



Sex Ed by Phantasmoplast

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Summary: El hears a new word for the first time, and decides to ask Mike what it means. Takes place 2 years after the events of Season 1. Originally a one-shot, but now multiple chapters. Mileven pairing. Of course, I own nothing :)

1. Learning

The girls were getting on Eleven's nerves again.

She had come to expect it during her eighth period algebra class at Hawkins Middle. It was the last class in her school day, and her least favorite, because it was the only one she did not share with her friends Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Will. She instead sat at a table with three other girls - Lola, Bianca, and Nancy (Nancy confused El at first — she was quite surprised to learn that two unrelated people could sometimes have the same name).

They were giggling, as per the usual. El shut her eyes briefly and gave her head a little shake, trying to concentrate on what the teacher was saying. It had been nearly a year since Joyce had deemed her education caught-up enough to begin attending school, but she still struggled at times to understand all the new information.

And then she was immediately assigned a seat next to the three biggest gossips (as Dustin called them) in the school, because the old fashioned math teacher figured El would get along better with other girls. The logic was clearly flawed, as she found these particular three unbearable, but Eleven couldn't bring herself to really hate them — after all, they were nice and they *meant* well. But the presence of constantly giggling, whispering girls next to her did little to help her concentration...

"Psst, El!"

...particularly when they started talking to her.

"El, do you mind if we ask you a— a personal question?" That was Bianca. No sooner were the words out of the girl's mouth than she, along with Lola and Nancy, collapsed in a fit of giggles. El raised her head from her notes to stare at Bianca wordlessly, hoping she would get the message.

She didn't. "So, you and Mike Wheeler..." Bianca's voice dropped slightly as a mischievous grin spread across her face. She leaned forward and whispered, "*Have you done it yet?*" Her friends giggled

harder. El wouldn't have thought that to be possible if she hadn't seen it. She wrinkled up her brow, confused.

"Done what?" She inquired blankly.

Lola and Bianca smothered full-on laughs, leaving Nancy to elaborate between sniggers. "You know — *sex!*"

This did nothing to clear El's confusion. She tilted her head at the unfamiliar word. "What is—"

"Table three! Enough side chatter, please!" came the teacher's crisp reprimand, and El fell silent abruptly. The girls quieted down, but not before Nancy patted El on the wrist, winking at her conspiratorially. Eleven was left to ponder the meaning of the word. "Sex". She couldn't figure out if she liked the sound of it. It was not a pretty word, she decided, though she supposed her opinion might change once she found out what it meant.

She had heard the word "sexy" before — one of the boys in her science class had said it to her when she first started at school and she had later asked Mike what it meant. He had turned bright red, like he did when he was embarrassed, and demanded to know where she heard it. When she told him, he had gotten angrier than she had ever seen him, storming to his feet and pacing around the Wheeler basement, muttering to himself.

"Mike? Why are you angry?" She had asked, worried that she had done something wrong. Mike turned to face her, his brow furrowed, and tried to explain, gesturing vaguely with his hands.

"He shouldn't have called you that. It means... like... attractive, you know? Pretty. But in a really disrespectful way. You don't— you shouldn't say stuff like that to a girl. To anyone. It's messed up." Eleven had remained silent, wondering why it was disrespectful to call someone pretty. After all, Mike had called her pretty not long after they had first met, hadn't he? She didn't feel disrespected then.

El now took her knowledge of "sexy" and tried to work out the strange new word. The girls had asked her if she had done sex with Mike. But that didn't make sense. How could you *do* pretty but

disrespectful? Those were adjectives, she remembered from her English class. To do something, it had to be a verb. Could pretty be a verb? El didn't think so, but she wasn't sure.

I'll ask Mike later, she resolved. She was going to his house later, she remembered, along with Will, Dustin, and Lucas. The prospect brightened her up considerably, and El fidgeted with excitement until the end of the period, when the sound of the bell broke her from her thoughts. She quickly packed up her papers and folders and left the building.

Three hours later

"Seeya, Mike! Later El!" Dustin shouted. He exited, allowing the door to fall shut, but it opened again immediately. Will's head poked through the gap between the door and the wall.

"El, remember to call Mom when you're coming home, okay?" He waved and receded into the outdoors, followed by the slamming of the back door, and they were left alone in the Wheeler's basement. El, who had been sitting next to Mike on the small sofa, immediately snuggled closer and rested her head on his shoulder. He smiled at her and wrapped his arm around her, listening to her quiet breathing.

Mike gazed down at the small fifteen-year old girl nestled into his chest. She was beautiful, he thought, like he always did when he looked at her. He couldn't help it. Even when he first met her, dressed in a way-too-big yellow shirt, dripping with rainwater, shivering, pale and underfed, what little hair she had plastered to her skull... even then she was pretty. And now, at fifteen, hair still short but stylishly so (His sister Nancy called it a pixie cut, and liked to complain that she could never pull it off herself), matured in body and well-fed and dressed...

It almost hurt his heart, in the best of ways. He planted a kiss on the top of her head and she murmured quietly in response. Mike lay down on the sofa, staring at the ceiling, and Eleven crawled forward to lay atop him, her head on his chest, enjoying the way her body rose and fell with his breaths. For several long moments nobody spoke, before a thought seemed to cross El's mind.

"Mike?" She twisted and propped up her head so her chin was resting near his heart, gazing at him with dark brown eyes.

"Yes, El?"

"What is sex?"

The question was posed so innocently and so *normally* it took Mike entirely by surprise. His eyes shot open and he stared down at her.

"W-what!?" He could feel his face rapidly turning red and his heart beginning to race. How was he supposed to explain sex to El? And where had she heard it, anyway?

She frowned. "Some girls said it. In math. They asked if me and you did sex." She bit her lower lip and scrunched her brow, trying to remember their exact words. "But it makes no sense. You said sexy means pretty but bad, but how do you *do* pretty but bad?"

Mike was clamping his eyes shut and pressing his hands over his face. *I should not be the one explaining this*, he thought. *Damn it, if only she had gone to school last year and had Sex Ed with all of us I wouldn't—*

"Mike." She could tell the subject was making him uncomfortable. "You don't have to tell. I will ask Jonathan. Or Joyce or Hopper. Later." Eleven had moved in with the Byers after Will came back, and had grown to love them as family.

"*NONONO!*" Mike all but shouted, causing El to jump. He could think of not one thing worse than the idea of El asking Chief Hopper what sex was. He knew he would trace it back to Mike and oh God he carried a gun with him all the time... Eleven just stared up at him, bemused.

"Why no?" She had that way of tilting her head and asking those simple questions in that high, inquisitive voice that got to Mike like nothing else. He couldn't refuse her anything and he knew it. And right now he wanted to punch himself for it.

"Because... because..." Mike struggled to explain. "You know how I told you that kissing is a private thing? Like you don't talk about it with other people?" El nodded seriously. "Well, sex is like kissing,

kind of, but... the next step. It's something you do with someone you really, really like. And you shouldn't talk about it with other people, especially adults."

El was frowning and biting her lip again, like she always did when something was confusing her. "Have we done sex?" She asked. Mike flushed again and shook his head vigorously.

"No! No, no. Trust me, you would know if we did, it's... much more extreme than kissing." *Damn it, Wheeler, change the subject, change the subject... Talk about Eggos, Eggos will work, they always do.* "El, are you hung—"

"But we kiss. All the time. And I really, really like you, and you really, really like me." Eleven didn't need to ask if that was true. She knew. "So why do we not sex?"

For the first time, Mike was uncomfortably aware of her hips pressing against his as she lay on top of him. He gently lifted her off of him and sat up to escape the compromising position. "El, it— it's not— only grown-ups have sex, El. It's not something for teenagers like us..." He stopped short because he knew that wasn't strictly true and he hated to lie to her. "Well, not for teenagers like — like us, us. You know? Like me and Lucas and Dustin." He glanced at Eleven to see if she understood, and knew immediately that she didn't.

"What about Nancy and Jonathan? Do they sex?" She asked after a pause. She knew they liked each other just like she and Mike did, plus they were older.

"Christ, El, I don't know—" He paused, feeling immediately guilty. His voice came out louder and sharper than he intended, driven by embarrassment, and he could tell by El's expression that she was hurt by his tone. He quickly apologized, taking her hand in his. "Sorry, you didn't do anything wrong. I shouldn't have yelled. But... I don't know, El, I really don't."

She looked at him and squeezed his hand. "Mike. Friends don't lie," she reminded him, bringing up an old expression. He sighed.

"Okay, yeah, they probably do. Have sex. That's, uh," he cleared his

throat and flushed once more. "When Jonathan sleeps over here, that's probably what they're doing." Mike curled his lip in disgust and tried to get the image of his older sister's sexual activities out of his head.

He was dismayed to find that, rather than satisfying El's curiosity, his words seemed to only fascinate her further. "Really? They sex for the whole night?" Her eyes widened in awe.

Mike laughed despite himself. For being a super-powerful, monster-killing badass, Eleven's innocence never ceased to amuse him. "No, El, no. I... don't think it takes that long. But then they sleep together after. That's another thing people who like each other do."

El's eyes lit up as he said something she recognized. "Me and you have slept together!"

Mike nodded uncomfortably. "Uh, yeah, I guess we have." He studied the pattern of thread on the couch intently, avoiding her gaze. There was silence for a minute, and Mike was just beginning to relax when the girl at his side spoke up again.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"What is sex like?"

Damn it, girl! "You know, El, I've never done it before, so I don't really know." He prayed that she was satisfied with his answer.

"How do you do it?" Innocent brown eyes blinked at him.

"Uhmeeee." Mike's voice seemed to have died on him.

"You said it's like kissing. But more, extreme?" She stumbled over the unfamiliar word, but quickly recovered. "Is it like this?" She leaned toward Mike, and before he could react, kissed him. Hard. Very hard, like she was trying to force her head through his. It hurt his lips and teeth, but he couldn't get annoyed. Not with her. He chuckled and embraced her and held her to his body lovingly.

"No, El, I don't think so. It's only like kissing because of who you do it with, you know? But it's different otherwise."

"Different how?" She inquired. Mike sighed, finally resigning himself to his fate. *At least we can get it over with and change the subject.*

"Well, for starters, I think, uh..." He winced. "You're naked when you do it."

"Naked? Why?" El was confused. Mike had told her, the very first day they met, that you weren't supposed to let people see you naked. Why was sex different?

"Aghhh, because... well, you have to do... something, and clothes kind of get in the way because it involves your body." Mike decided that maybe resigning himself to his fate was a bad idea after all. "And, El, I'm sorry, but I don't think I should be the one to explain all this to you. We'll figure out a way for you to learn. Maybe the nurse can give you a lesson or something one day after school. Okay?"

El studied his face. He was pleading her to say yes, she could tell. "Okay, Mike." He exhaled slowly and relaxed, and suddenly she realized how uncomfortable she had made him. She felt bad, so she kissed him again. He responded, pressing his lips to hers and wrapping his arms around her body. El moved eagerly into the kiss, suddenly poking her tongue into his mouth. She turned him and pushed him backward so they were lying down once more, her on top of him. His hands slowly made their way down her body toward her waist—

"*Mike?*" Came a call from upstairs. They leapt apart, both sitting straight upright.

"*Yes, Mom?*" Mike called back, exchanging a sheepish glance with Eleven.

"Is El staying for dinner, honey?"

He glanced at her inquiringly, and she nodded. "Joyce told me I could in the morning," she told him. He smiled happily.

"She is," He called to his mom.

"Can you two come up here and help me with dinner, please?" came the reply. The two teenagers stood, hand in hand, and began to head up the stairs. Before they got to the top, Mike suddenly stopped El and whispered urgently to her.

"El, please, whatever you do, don't say anything about sex up there. Okay?"

She smiled at him. "Okay."

A/N: So... just a funny idea I came up with one day. I love the Mileven pairing and was thinking about what would happen in their relationship as they matured. Inevitably, the topic of sex would be introduced at some point in their teenage lives - I like to think this is how it would happen. Fifteen might be a bit old for hearing about sex for the first time, but hey, any younger and it's verging on creepy, right? Hope you enjoyed, anyway! Would sincerely appreciate any reviews.

Over and out!

2. Presents

A/N: So, this was supposed to be a one-shot originally, but after all the positive comments and PMs I was encouraged to write a follow-up chapter. You guys rock. Thank you SO much for all the support — you have no idea how much it means to me, with this being my first fanfic and all. Enjoy!

The following school day passed relatively uneventfully. Eleven went to her classes like always, did her work like always, and ate lunch with Mike, Will, Lucas and Dustin like always. After assuring a disappointed Nancy, Bianca, and Lola that no, she did not do and had never done sex with Mike, she left the school building and hopped on the bike that Joyce had given her for Christmas last year. She began to peddle down the hill toward Mike's house, but, unlike usual, not to see him. Nancy (his sister Nancy, not the other one) had promised to take her shopping today, and El had been looking forward to it all week. She loved Nancy and looked up to her. She was pretty and kind and smart and just about everything El wanted to be when she was older.

El turned onto Maple Street and pulled up outside Mike's house. She let her bike fall, walked to the door, and knocked like she had been taught. Several seconds later, the door opened and Nancy stepped out, wearing a t-shirt, a short denim jacket and matching jeans.

"Hiya, El!" She extended a closed fist. El bumped her own fist into it and smiled shyly.

"Hi," she greeted, shuffling her feet and waiting for the older girl to continue.

"You all ready to go, then?" Nancy asked, smiling. El nodded enthusiastically.

"Are we taking Jonathan's car?" She asked, looking around and not seeing it. Nancy shook her head.

"No, it's a nice day out so I thought we'd walk. It's only a mile, so it

won't take too long. Is that okay with you?"

"Sure," El replied, nodding. She still had trouble picturing exact measurements in her head. She thought that a mile was pretty long, but if Nancy said it wasn't bad, El supposed it would be fine.

It was indeed fine. It took a short twenty minutes before they arrived at the store. Nancy held the door and gestured for El to step in.

El gazed around in awe, feeling her mouth drop open slightly. Rows upon rows of racks were filled with dresses and shirts and jeans and skirts. As she always did when entering this store, El marveled at the realization that this many clothes *existed*. She wondered if people from all around the world got their clothes here.

Nancy watched El's expression and felt a smile spread across her own face. She gave the younger girl a pat on the head and looked at her fondly. "You're adorable, you know that?" She told El, who tilted her head at Nancy, wondering what she had done to deserve the praise. Nancy just shook her head in response to the unspoken question and pointed to a part of the store near the back. "That's the teen section. You'll want to look there if you want to buy something."

El nodded and made a beeline straight toward it, Nancy at her side. She stopped when she reached the indicated section and slowly turned in a circle, wondering where to start. Nancy tapped her on the shoulder.

"You wanted a dress, right? For the Snowball next month?" She asked. El nodded. "They're over there. Pick out a few and you can try them on and see which one you like the best, sounds good?"

El thought choosing between all the pretty dresses was one of the hardest things she had ever done, harder than memorizing all the states in America and nearly as hard as restraining herself from eating Eggos too fast. It took her ten minutes to narrow it down between three: a long, feathery pink one and a similar one in yellow, and a light green satin strapless one. Nancy led her to the changing rooms, but stopped as she started to shut the door.

"El, will you be okay with the door closed?" She asked hesitantly.

Mike had told her of Eleven's phobia of being left in rooms alone. But the younger girl smiled and nodded proudly.

"Yes. It doesn't scare me anymore," she told Nancy, who grinned at her before allowing the door to fall shut.

It was another five minutes before the changing room door reopened and El stepped out. When she did, Nancy turned toward her and clapped her hands to her mouth.

"AHHH, oh my god!" she laughed. "You look so cute, El!" The younger teen was wearing the spring-green strapless dress, and it hugged her petite figure perfectly, emphasizing the rich darkness of her large eyes.

She smiled widely, bursting with pride, and did a little spin. "Pretty?" She asked Nancy.

"So pretty. Mike's going to die when he sees you, just wait," she said, causing El to blush a light shade of pink.

Nancy was having trouble restraining herself. "*Eeeeeeee,*" she squealed, embracing El tightly. "My little sis is all grown up!"

Eleven giggled. "You are my sister," she repeated thoughtfully, nodding to herself. "Yes. You are my sister!" She liked the idea, so she hugged Nancy back hard. The older girl laughed and poked her in the stomach.

"Don't let Mike hear you say that," she joked. El wrinkled her brow.

"He will be jealous?" She asked, confused. Would he think she was choosing Nancy over him? That didn't make sense — Mike was her favorite person, ever, and she thought he knew that.

Nancy shook her head, grinning. "No, no — but since he's my brother, if me and you were sisters, that would mean that he was *your* brother too, you see?" Understanding dawned in El's eyes. "And obviously, if someone's your sister, you don't want to—"

"Sex them," El suggested.

...at the same time as Nancy finished "—kiss them." Then: "WHAT?"

El clapped her hand over her mouth, suddenly remembering what Mike had told her about sex being a private topic. She felt herself turning red and looked down at the floor silently.

Nancy stared at her suspiciously. "You know what sex is?" The other girl just shrugged and refused to meet her gaze.

"Eleven, look at me." Nancy tipped her chin up with one hand and looked El in the eye sternly. "You and Mike didn't... do anything, did you?" When El didn't respond, she spoke again. "Listen, El, I won't be angry, but you have to tell me. You and Mike have never had sex, right? Oh please say you haven't."

El shook her head. "I heard it. School. Some girls asked. Didn't know what it meant and asked Mike." She heard Nancy let out a sigh of relief and looked up.

"Well. Thank god. I panicked for a minute there. Hoped you guys weren't being unsafe."

"Unsafe?" El inquired, tilting her head.

Nancy frowned. "Mike told you what sex was, but didn't explain about safety?" She snorted in disapproval. "El, sex is how babies are made. You have to be safe because otherwise, the girl might get pregnant." She looked at El, saw her blank expression, and quickly elaborated. "Pregnant is when you have a baby growing inside you for a long time. It only happens to girls."

"And that's bad?" El asked. Nancy shrugged.

"Unless your goal is to have a baby, then yes, it's bad. And at your age, or even mine, you shouldn't even be considering that. Having a baby isn't something you should do until you're older and you're ready. You don't have to worry about it now."

El frowned and looked up at Nancy, wondering. "So, if you don't want to have a baby, why do you sex someone?" She answered her own question a second later. "Is it like kissing? It feels nice and makes you tingly?"

Nancy, who had remained respectably composed until now, blushed faintly and cleared her throat. "Yeah, it uh... feels good. Really good, but kind of different from kissing. You'll learn one day when you're older," she said, but even as she spoke, she looked El up and down. *She's not a little kid anymore, she reminded herself. Nor is Mike. They've grown up. I did it for the first time when I was only a year older, and Steve was a douche, whereas they love each other. Maybe I overreacted...*

El said nothing, waiting for Nancy to continue the discussion. The older girl frowned as a thought came to her mind. "By the way, El, Mike didn't, ah... did he say anything about me in this conversation?"

El thought for a second, then nodded. "He said you and Jonathan do sex all night," she told Nancy, who cried out indignantly.

"He said that? What the hell, that's not even close to being true!" She made an angry, distinctly unfeminine sound in her throat. It was not a pretty sound, El thought. "Oooooh, wait till I get my hands on the little prick." She clenched her hands into fists.

El was struck with a growing sense of alarm. "He said because I asked. You shouldn't be angry at him," she said, feeling the need to defend him. The look Nancy gave her was one of betrayal. "I'm sorry, Nancy," El added, hanging her head. "It's my fault."

Nancy continued to glare for a few more seconds, then sighed and shook her head. "No, no, El. I'm not angry. You couldn't have known any better." She patted El on the shoulder, then, after an awkward pause, decided it was time to change the subject. "Hey, is that the dress you want?" She asked, indicating the green one El was currently wearing. The girl brightened and nodded her head.

"Yes."

"Okay, so let's buy that for you and go home. How's that sound?"

The dress ended up being surprisingly expensive. El, who was still getting used to the idea of money, didn't realize, and Nancy elected not to tell her so the girl didn't feel any worse than she already it. Instead she handed over the due amount without complaint and gave the bag to a very happy Eleven.

"Alright, let's go," she said, and El followed her out of the clothing store. They turned right out of the door and began to follow their steps home, but Nancy stopped suddenly.

"Nancy?" El asked, turning back questioningly.

Nancy held up her hand, a thoughtful looking crossing her face. "El, could you just wait here for a moment? There's something I want to get. It'll only take a second."

"Okay," El replied uncertainly, and Nancy turned and walked briskly back to where they had just left. Instead of entering the clothing store, though, she stepped into the convenience store next door. El waited a minute or two before Nancy came back out, smiling to herself and holding a smallish plastic bag.

El pointed. "What's in it?" She asked, and Nancy's smirk widened to a full on grin.

"A present," she answered evasively.

"For Jonathan?"

"No, for Mike."

El's eyes widened in surprise. She was very curious, but sensed she would get no more out of Nancy, so she remained silent.

It was another twenty minute walk before they arrived back at the Wheeler's house. Nancy checked the watch on her wrist. "It's nearly 5:30, El, so I'm sure Mike and the guys are home. Why don't you go down to the basement and say hi?" She said, so El nodded, thanked her for the dress, and headed downstairs.

"There's our resident Jedi!" Called Dustin as she entered the basement. He, along with Mike, Lucas, and Will, were piled onto the small couch, with a record player blasting music that El recognized in the background. Bruce Springsteen, she remembered the singer's name. He was Mike's favorite. The song was one called "I'm on Fire", she remembered.

Mike himself rushed over to Eleven to embrace her. "Have fun?" He

asked by way of greeting. She nodded and opened the bag to show him the pale green satin of the dress. "Wow, nice color," he commented, and she smiled, glad that he agreed with her. He pulled her back to the couch and their friends made room. With all five boys and El, it was quite cramped, but she found that she didn't mind being pressed close to Mike.

Nancy remained upstairs, considering her next course of action. She could give Mike his "present" now, but it would embarrass him in front of his friends. Maybe it would be best to wait until later.

Then she remembered what El had said Mike told her about Nancy and Jonathan. *Maybe he deserves a bit of public embarrassment*, she thought, and smirked. She grabbed a pen and a spare sheet of paper, folded it in half, and began to write.

Downstairs, the boys were discussing their favorite movie characters. "No way, Darth Vader would definitely win. No contest, case closed," Lucas argued loudly.

Dustin nodded. "Yeah, I think the Force definitely tips it into his favor. I mean, we've all seen what she can do—" he jerked his head toward Eleven"—and he's like a hundred times more powerful. I agree with Lucas, it's a no-brainer." He allowed himself a satisfied smile at his own argument before the sound of the basement door opening distracted him. He, along with the rest of the group, was surprised to see Nancy heading down the stairs — she almost never came down here, especially while they were hanging out.

"Hey, boys," she greeted, raising an eyebrow at the somewhat ridiculous image of them all squished together on the little crouch.

"Uh, hey, Nance, what's up?" Mike said, somewhat warily. She was carrying a plastic bag in her hand, he noticed. She tossed it to him.

"Christmas came early this year, little bro. I'm going to head over to Jonathan's now—" she glanced pointedly at El and Mike"—so you guys enjoy yourselves ." She turned and hurried up the stairs, hiding her grin.

"Nancy, what—" Mike called after her, but the door closed and he

could only shake his head in confusion. "I don't think she's ever gotten me a gift in my life," he said doubtfully, giving the bag a shake.

"What is it?" asked Will, voicing the thoughts of the whole group, and Mike shrugged.

"Not sure," he replied. He stood, moved to the table where they played D&D, and opened the bag upside down, letting the contents — an assortment of small, brightly colored packets— fall onto the wooden surface. Mike picked up a blue one and read the label to himself. *Size medium ultra safe latex condoms*—

Wait, what?

Mike felt himself flush a deep shade of maroon and immediately started shoveling the packets back into the bag.

I am going to MESS HER UP. Stupid smug little...

The others were craning their necks to see what the contents of the bag were. El saw the bright packets and lit up.

"Candy?" She asked with enthusiasm.

Mike nodded, far too vigorously to be sincere. "Uh, yeah, candy. We'll... have some after dinner. Maybe." *She's such a conniving meddling arrogant BITCH.*

Dustin squinted suspiciously and stood from the couch. Before Mike could stop him, he lunged for the table and snatched a green packet, bringing it close to his face to read the writing.

"Dustin! Give it back, now!" Mike shouted, far too late. After a second the other boy threw back his head and guffawed.

"What? What is it?" Lucas demanded, standing up also. Will and El followed suit and they clustered around the table. Mike frantically swatted the packets from their hands, stuffing them back into the bag, but the damage was done. Soon Dustin and Lucas were tearing up from laughter and Will was looking as embarrassed as Mike. Eleven, for her part, had no idea what was going on, and just

watched the chaos around her with curiosity.

Dustin held up his green packet, wiping moisture from his eyes, and said, sniggering, "She got you a size small, Mike. Your sister has zero faith in you." Mike ripped the thing from his grasp and glared daggers at him.

"Shut up, Dustin." The curly-haired boy just laughed harder, grabbing the bag and upending it. A river of multicolored plastic packets flowed out.

Dustin stared. "Christ, Wheeler, how much sex does your sister think you two are gonna have? She got you, like, a year's supply," he cackled.

"Dustin, I'm warning you—"

"Look!" Lucas suddenly exclaimed while grinning evilly at Mike. He held up a folded piece of paper. "She left you a note!" Mike lunged for it, but Lucas nimbly darted out of reach and began to read Nancy's neat, slanting handwriting.

Mike~

El mentioned a discussion you two had. Only right that a sister should help out, don't you think? I didn't know what size you were so I got you some of everything. Have fun and don't do anything El isn't comfortable with.

—N

"Have fun and don't do anything El isn't comfortable with," Lucas quoted gleefully, as Mike shot a betrayed glance at El. "Ugh. Gross. Should we leave you two alone?" El looked at Mike for help. She wished someone would explain what was happening.

"You guys are awful. Literally the worst," Mike mumbled, hiding his face in his hands. Will, who had thus far remained silent, cleared his throat.

"Guys, it's... not really our business, we shouldn't make fun of them," he suggested weakly, looking as uncomfortable as they had ever seen

him. Dustin and Lucas looked at each other, then at Will, and shook their heads in unison.

"Sorry, Byers, but this opportunity is too good to pass up," Dustin replied. He spread his hands in a *what can you do?* expression and added, "After all, look at all the ammunition Nancy gave us! You really want to waste that?"

"Yeah," Lucas added, sniggering. "It's only fair — we get ammunition to use on Mike, and he gets ammunition to use on El." Dustin roared with laughter and fist-bumped Lucas, who looked pleased with himself. El looked from boy to boy as Will and Mike groaned.

"That's disgusting, guys," Will protested. They ignored him. El decided it was time to speak up. She tugged on Mike's sleeve.

"Mike?"

He looked at her despondently.

She looked closely at the packets and tried to sound out the words, moving her lips silently. "What's a — con-dom?" Lucas and Dustin didn't usually laugh when she asked what a word meant, but they did now, and she felt oddly hurt. The feeling mounted when Mike didn't respond.

"Go on, Mike, tell her what a condom is," Lucas crowed. Mike extended his middle finger vertically and extended his arm toward Lucas in a gesture El had seen before but didn't understand. Then he turned toward her.

"Sorry, El. I'll explain later, okay? When these losers are gone," he told her, pointedly glaring at Lucas and Dustin.

"Okay," she said uncertainly.

"Yeah? What else are you gonna do when we losers are gone?" Dustin asked, all false innocence.

"End yourself, Dustin!"

Just then the door to the basement opened and Mike's mom stuck her

head through the gap. The boys transitioned from squabbling to arranging themselves perfectly in front of the table within seconds, blocking her view. It was a testament to the familiarity and strength of their friendship that they could go from teasing and bickering to working together without a word being spoken.

"Will, El, Joyce is here to pick you two up," she called after a pause, wondering why they were standing so neatly and rigidly in front of the table. Her son's friends were a strange bunch, she thought.

Will nodded, latching onto the opportunity to change the subject from his sister and Mike. "Okay, Mrs. Wheeler, thank you for telling us. Come on, El, let's go." He grabbed her by the hand and led her up the stairs. "See you guys tomorrow," he called brightly, obviously trying hard to pretend the events of the past ten minutes had never happened. The others waved. El gave Mike a quick hug and a kiss and grabbing her new dress before they left, followed by the sound of Lucas and Dustin snickering.

"I can't believe *Nancy* gave you condoms," Lucas chuckled. "This is your *sister* we're talking about. Straight-edge, stuck up Nancy." He shook his head in admiration. "Would never have guessed that she was this cool in all the time I've known her. That was some serious strategy. She destroyed you, Mike, giving you her 'present' in front of all of us."

Mike said nothing. He had some plans for Nancy.

"Soooo," Dustin said after an awkward silence. "When are you and El gonna do it, huh?"

"You're so nosy, Dustin!" Mike snapped. "And I don't know!"

Dustin held his hands up in surrender, grinning. "Jeez, sorry." He clapped his friend on the back. "Seriously though, man, good for you. Nothing wrong with having a bit of fun with your girlfriend, right?"

"Suck my di—"

"Ask El," Dustin suggested, cutting him off. Satisfied with Mike's sputtering reaction and that he had the last word, he turned to Lucas.

"You wanna get going, bud?"

"Sure, whenever," Lucas replied. "Mike needs some time to... think." He snorted with laughter once again. He punched his friend in the shoulder and waved.

"Later, man," he called as he and Dustin exited.

"Tell us all about it," Dustin shouted, and the door closed before Mike could tell him to go fuck himself.

He was left standing alone in the basement, the bag of condoms lying in a heap on the table. He wasted no time, grabbing a pencil from his desk, flipping over Nancy's letter, and beginning to write on the back side.

Six hours later

A very worn-out but satisfied Nancy opened the door to her house and stepped inside quietly, looking around the living room. As she had expected, the house was silent and everyone seemed to be asleep — it was past midnight, after all. She tiptoed up to her room, closed the door and changed into pajamas. She washed up in the bathroom and, returning to her room, threw back the covers to her bed.

Her eyes widened in surprise. Lying under the sheets was a plastic bag and a folded sheet of paper — the same ones she had given to her brother. She sighed in exasperation. "Mike, you stupid, you weren't supposed to give them back..." she muttered to herself. She lifted up the bag to move it aside and stopped. It felt lighter than it had before.

She glanced at the letter and noticed that it was not her neat handwriting on it, but rather Mike's untidy scrawl. She picked it up and read it to herself.

Nance~

Didn't need these ones, so Christmas is coming early for you, too. Only right that a brother should return the favor, don't you think? Have fun and don't do anything Jonathan isn't comfortable with.

—M

With a growing sense of suspicion, Nancy opened the bag and peered inside. Instead of the rainbow of packets she had given Mike, she saw only lime green ones. She picked one up and turned it over in her hand.

Size small ultra safe latex condoms.

Nancy stared, mouth open, shocked at her little brother's bravado. Then she threw back her head and laughed out loud.

Downstairs, Mike, lying awake in bed, allowed himself a satisfied smile when he heard the startled laughter. *Take that, Nance. Two can play at this game*, he thought, and minutes later he fell asleep with a smile on his lips.

A/N: Aaaand we're done! Please, if you enjoyed and have the time, drop me a review! Didja like it? Should I continue this? Start another fanfic? Is there anything you guys would like me to write about in particular? I'm all ears!

Over and out!

3. Snowball

A/N: You might be able to tell, but this was originally going to be two chapters, only the first one ended up being too short and nothing really happened in it so I combined them. That's why this one is longer than the other two (5,510 words!). Enjoy the extra length and, as always, thank you SOSO much for all the positive feedback. You guys do a fantastic job keeping me motivated, so if you like it please review as always!

It was the day before the Snowball. The one last year had been cancelled due to a blizzard, and, for whatever reason, the school principal had refused to reschedule it. Mike had been severely disappointed.

El had already promised to come to this one with him, and Mike was even more enthusiastic because, now that they were in high school, the dance extended far later into the night. He prayed it wouldn't end up being cancelled again.

After the incident several days prior, Mike decided it was in his best interest to get El properly educated. He dreaded having to explain the gritty details about sex that she would inevitably ask for sooner or later — especially with Dustin, Lucas, and now Nancy's merciless attitudes regarding the subject. The problem remained, though, of working it out with the Hawkins Middle staff. Mike didn't know who would be willing to teach El this kind of thing.

No, he corrected himself. He didn't know who *he* would be willing to ask, given the obvious implication of the request. His mom? Hell no. Joyce? HELL no. Chief Hopper? Mike would rather throw himself off a cliff — without El there to catch him this time.

That was how Mike ended up in Mr. Clarke's science classroom one day after school, standing with an oddly stiff posture and double checking to make sure the door was closed before he spoke.

"Is this about the Heathkit Ham Shack, Mike? You're always welcome to use it if you want to, you know," Mr. Clarke said, plopping himself

into a chair opposite the high school boy. Mike shook his head, wishing that the Heathkit was all he needed to talk about.

"No, it's, ah—" Mike took a deep breath. Stalling wouldn't make this any easier. And this was Mr. Clarke he was dealing with — the guy was like a big teenager himself. He was almost like an uncle to Mike and his friends, in fact, someone they were totally comfortable around.

That almost made it worse.

"I kind of need help. With El." He paused, wondering how to proceed.

Mr. Clarke leaned forward with a knowing look. "Relationship problems?"

"No, no, nothing like that," Mike said hastily, shaking his head and waving his hands. "There's just some... *stuff*... she didn't really learn because she didn't go to school until this year, and she's been asking about it and it's kind of hard to talk to her about and I didn't know who could explain—" he cut himself off and took another breath, realizing he had been rambling. "Sorry."

"Would I be correct in assuming this *stuff* to be something of a sexual nature?" Mr. Clarke asked, his tone somewhere between dry and gentle.

Mike turned red and looked up in surprise. "How did you—"

"Mike, a scientist should always be making inferences based on prior knowledge and observations. It wasn't hard to figure out."

Mike nodded several times. "Right. Well, yeah, you were right, of course. Someone in her class was talking to her about it, and she asked me. I didn't know what to tell her. I mean, I tried to explain but I didn't really go into detail, you know?"

Mr. Clarke twisted the end of his long mustache between a thumb and forefinger, staring thoughtfully past Mike's head. "You're not comfortable talking about it with your own girlfriend? Remember, Mike, sex is a part of life, even for you teenagers. Especially for you teenagers, in fact. It's not dirty or taboo, despite what the media and

your parents might try and tell you. It's just biology when it comes down to it."

Mike shook his head helplessly. "I understand that. I just can't help feeling like I'd be taking advantage of her if something were to... to happen, you know? She has no idea what it is and what it means," he said.

"Well, there you go. Even more reason why you should try to explain to her," he said, spreading his hands in a *you see?* gesture.

"Hmm," Mike grunted, chewing his lip and looking uncertain. Mr. Clarke relented.

"Tell you what," he said, leaning forward and patting his student on the shoulder. "Send her up to my room after school tomorrow, and I'll talk to her. You shouldn't have to do something you're not comfortable with."

Mike looked up, surprised. "You? Really?" He bit his tongue as he realized what he had inadvertently implied. "Sorry, I didn't mean—"

Mr. Clarke frowned. "I'm thirty-six, Mike. Just because I'm a science nerd doesn't mean I've never been in an intimate relationship." He raised an eyebrow. "I would think you of all people should understand that." He gave a small smile and winked to take any sting out of his words.

Mike grinned sheepishly. "Yeah, I guess so," he acknowledged.

There was a moment of silence before Mr. Clarke stood from his chair, stretched, and rubbed his hands together. "If that's all, Mike, I have quizzes that I need to get a head start grading," he said, looking mournfully at the massive stack of papers on his desk. Mike stood as well.

"Okay. Sorry for taking up your time, Mr. Clarke. And thank you for offering to talk with El."

"It's no problem," the science teacher smiled. "We teachers are here to help." He walked Mike to the exit of the room and opened the door for him. As the boy stepped out, he added, "Remember, my room

tomorrow after school. Make sure she doesn't forget." He winked again. "After all, I'm sure she'll be wanting to know for the Snowball on Thursday." And he shut the door, leaving Mike red in the face and with a ducked head, but grinning all the same.

The next day, Eleven left school just before 5 o'clock instead of the usual 3:15, her head spinning from all the information Mr. Clarke had given her. There had been so much to learn, and he had taught in a brisk, matter-of-fact fashion, contrasting starkly to Mike's and Nancy's more cautious, uncomfortable approaches. El hoped she would be able to remember it all.

She had learned a lot of stuff that really surprised her, like that males had some different body parts that she didn't, and that sex, unlike kissing, was going to be painful the first time she did it. That particular fact made El a little nervous, but Nancy had said it felt really good, so she supposed it must be worth the pain.

By the time she got home, the sun was hanging low in the sky, coloring the clouds shades of brilliant orange and light purple. El thought it was one of the prettiest things she had ever seen, and she felt her mouth dropping open slightly as she stared.

"El?" She turned at the voice in time to see Joyce stepping out of her car and slamming the door. "Hey, baby!" Her adopted mother called, smiling and rushing to El to embrace her. "How was your day?"

"Good," El replied. "I stayed after school with Mr. Clarke. He taught me about—" She suddenly remembered what Mike had told her about not talking about sex with anyone, especially adults. She had already messed up with Nancy; she didn't want to disappoint him again. "—science," she finished lamely, looking down at the ground and shuffling her feet, but Joyce didn't seem to notice.

"That's great, sweetie," she said, kissing El on the top of the head. "I'm so proud of you for keeping up with your school work." She opened the door and ushered El inside.

Eleven looked up at her and suddenly frowned in confusion. "Why are you home early?" Joyce usually got off work much later in the evening.

The older woman smiled and tapped her nose with a finger. "My manager was feeling nice today. And I made sure to take advantage of it, because I also have something to teach you. You know what it is?"

El tilted her head, trying to think what it might be and coming up with nothing. "No."

"Dancing! You're going to the Snowball with Mike tomorrow, so you have to know how, right?"

El nodded. Mike had explained dancing to her before. He described it as "moving to the rhythm of music", which didn't really make sense to El. Why was that fun, she wondered? But everyone at school talked about the Snowball with such enthusiasm that she figured it had to be be.

Joyce dropped off her purse, splashed water on her face, and led El to the living room. "So," she began, turning to face her adopted daughter on the carpet, "I'll pretend to be Mike in this situation, and you'll play yourself." El giggled at the image. Joyce smiled indulgently and continued. "So, you're going to put your hand on my — sorry, on *Mike's* — shoulder, and he'll put his on your waist."

They did so. El had to crane her neck slightly to look up at Joyce.

"And now we stand like this, and to start, just... sway," Joyce said, and began to slowly, smoothly rock from side to side. El followed suit. After a minute of this, El wondered what all the fuss was about. It seemed quite bland and unexciting. But then she pictured that it was Mike's hand on her waist, rather than her adopted mother's, and her heart got all fluttery.

Maybe dancing is good after all, she thought.

After an hour of practice, Joyce congratulated El on her quick learning, assured her she would do great tomorrow at the dance, and started to make dinner. It was another hour before they sat down to eat. The beef stew was bland and somewhat tasteless, but El didn't complain. The fluttery excited feeling she got thinking about dancing with Mike remained throughout the evening, distracting her from the

taste (or lack thereof) and from Joyce, Will, and Jonathan's conversations (Hopper was working late into the evening, as was often the case, and had regretfully informed Joyce he would not be eating with the Byers tonight).

El went to bed that night feeling barely tired at all. She stared up at the ceiling of her room, still too fluttery to sleep. She briefly considered calling Mike on her Supercom, but the signal was weak from her house and he was probably asleep by now anyway. She tossed and turned and thought about the Snowball with a mixture of apprehension and excitement until she fell into a dreamless unconsciousness.

The next school day passed agonizingly slowly for El. She was distracted for most of it, and kept blankly staring out the window, forgetting to take notes or do her work. She wasn't the only one; so many students were whispering about the Snowball that several of the teachers gave up trying to make them work and just let them talk. Mr. Clarke was one of them.

By the time school ended, El was feeling nervous. Would she be able to dance well enough for Mike? Or would she disappoint him? Joyce had told her she would do great but El knew that she would've said that no matter what. Maybe she was just trying to boost El's confidence.

She shook herself, knowing she was being ridiculous. Mike had never been disappointed with her in the past. He was too patient and kind. *It will be good*, she told herself.

She biked home, opening the door and being greeted by Jonathan.

"Hey, sis." Her older brother gave her a high-five and smiled, leaning down so he was on her level. "You excited for tonight?"

She pushed back her feelings of nervousness and nodded firmly. "Yes," she told him. "You're coming?"

"Yeah," Jonathan replied, straightening and running a hand through his hair self-consciously. "I promised Nancy I'd go with her."

Something in his voice made El tilt her head. "But you don't want to?"

Jonathan shot her a surprised look and smiled slightly. She was way too good at reading people. "Well..." he shrugged. "It's not that I don't. Just... dances aren't really my thing, you know?"

"Why not?"

He shrugged again. "People. Lots of people. I prefer to watch crowds than to be thrown in the middle of them." He put a hand on her shoulder and smiled encouragingly. "But listen, that's just 'cause I'm a weirdo. You'll have fun, El, I know you will."

She was frowning. "I don't think you're a weirdo."

Jonathan chuckled and ruffled her hair. "Well, I'm glad someone has faith in me. What did I do to deserve you as a sister?"

El turned pink at the praise and smiled, shrugging. Jonathan laughed. "I'll be studying in my room until five-thirty," he said. "Then we'll drive to the school and meet up with Nancy and Mike, okay?"

"Okay!" El turned and, walking to her room, flopped down on her bed and smiled at nothing in particular. Jonathan had a way of making her feel at ease just by talking to her. Everything he said seemed so *sincere*. He had a certain purity of heart that reminded her of Mike. She was glad he was her brother now.

Now that she was feeling less nervous, the time passed much faster. El lounged in her room, doodled a few pictures out of boredom (she liked drawing occasionally but mostly liked to watch Will do it — he had an extraordinary talent that she was somewhat in awe of) and thought idly about various topics before she heard a knock on her door. She got to her feet and opened it to once again reveal Jonathan, now dressed in a crisp black suit. He was holding a bag in his hand.

"Here's your dress," he said, passing it to her. "You'd best change, it's nearly time to leave." He shut the door to give her privacy. El stripped quickly and picked up the dress, marveling at the way the soft pale green satin ran through her fingers like water. She slipped into it and turned to check her reflection in the mirror.

"Pretty," El whispered, just as she had all those years ago with the blonde wig and Nancy's dress, and she felt her eyes fill inexplicably with tears. She rubbed them away, confused. Why was she crying? She felt anything but sad.

Jonathan knocked again. "You ready yet?"

"Yes," she said, wiping away the last traces of moisture and opening the door. Jonathan's eyebrows shot up as took in her appearance. After a second he gave her a double thumbs up.

"Mike's a lucky guy," he said, and she grinned proudly as she followed him out of the house. They stopped outside of Jonathan's car as headlights flashed in the driveway. The approaching car was Hopper's, El recognized. The vehicle slowed to a stop and the headlights died.

The man himself stepped out of his car and nodded at Jonathan, offering him a manly shake of the hand.

"Hey, kid," the chief greeted. "I promised your mother I'd come here early and get dinner started..." he paused suddenly, looking Jonathan up and down and raising an eyebrow. "What's with the outfit?"

Jonathan grinned and scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. "I'm, uh, going to a dance." He gestured toward El. "We both are."

Hopper seemed to recognize El for the first time, and he made a choking noise in the back of his throat. "She's going in *that!*?" he exclaimed, gesturing at her off-the-shoulders dress.

El was hurt. "You don't like it?" she asked. Hopper always seemed so wise and all-knowing; if he didn't like it, should she not wear it?

Jonathan snorted at Hopper's reaction and laid a hand on his arm. "Easy, Hop. Don't worry, it's just a dance."

The chief shook his head like a bull. "She looks like a— a—" he tried to find a polite way to phrase it, and failed.

"She looks grown-up," Jonathan offered. Hopper shook his head vigorously.

"She's not supposed to. She's a kid, Jonathan. What am I going to tell your mother if—"

"You don't have to tell her anything. Mom saw the dress and she liked it," Jonathan told him, and Hopper put his head in his hands, breathing out. "Nothing's going to happen to her, chief. I'll look after her. And Mike, and Nancy. Don't worry about it."

Hopper glared at him for a second, then sighed. "I'll hold you to that." He started to walk into the house before turn around and raising a hand awkwardly. "Well, you kids have fun. And no funny business with you and Mike, hear me?" he warned, pointing at El, and stepped into the brightly-lit house, muttering something about "*kids these days*".

El tugged on Jonathan's sleeve. "Why was he angry? And what's funny business?" she asked him, worried.

Her foster brother shook his head, smiling to himself. "Don't worry about it. The chief's just... old fashioned." He got in the front seat of his car, gesturing for El to do the same. She lowered herself into the passenger seat, still confused.

Jonathan started the car and began driving up the hill toward the school. El gazed out the window, heart beating fast with excitement. She hoped Mike would like her dress as much as she did.

I hope he calls me pretty, she thought secretly.

It was only a few minutes before they arrived at Hawkins Middle. El opened the car door and jumped out the second Jonathan slowed to a stop. She turned in a circle, scanning for Mike and Nancy. A trickle of people, couples mostly, ran from the parking lot up to the school. There were a few she recognized, but most of the faces were unfamiliar — this was, she reminded herself, a dance for all of the high school and not just her grade, so she wouldn't know most of them.

Jonathan came to her side. "See them?" he asked, also turning in a circle. El shook her head. "They're late," Jonathan muttered, checking his watch. El glanced at him and hid a smile. She had learned early

on in her life with the Byers that Jonathan liked to be on time, and hated it when people he was waiting for were late. It amused her, though she would never tell him that.

Suddenly he pointed. "There they are!" He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted. "Nancy!"

She turned, and El caught her breath. The older girl was wearing a simple but supremely elegant dark blue dress, seeming to make her float rather than walk. A sudden feeling of inferiority swept over El, but she quickly forgot about it when she saw Mike coming toward her. He was dressed in a suit like Jonathan's, and it made him look very official, like some important figure.

For his part, Mike felt his mind go blank when he saw El. She seemed to be literally glowing in the moonlight reflecting off her pale green dress and ivory shoulders. *Stunning* was the word that came to Mike's head. He felt momentarily tongue-tied as he approached her.

"You look amazing," he told her quietly after he found his voice. She intertwined her fingers with his and touched her forehead against his own.

"Pretty?" she whispered, knowing what he would say but wanting to hear it.

"Pretty doesn't cut it," he whispered back, and she smiled.

"*Ahem.*" Nancy cleared her throat and looked at the two with a mixture of exasperation and affection, jerking her head up to the school while Jonathan pointedly looked away. Mike blushed and stepped away from El.

The four of them walked up the asphalt path into the school lobby and were directed to the auditorium. As soon as they stepped inside El felt her mouth drop open.

The room was a chaotic swirl of rainbow lights, shining from all around the room and reflecting off big shiny plastic snowflakes. Hundreds of people were packed tightly together, leaving only a few feet between couples. Music was blasting from a multitude of huge

speakers that stood on the stage, next to a few people who seemed to be managing the dance. El recognized the student council president, whose name eluded her at the moment, but the other faces were unfamiliar. She felt overwhelmed by the whole thing until she felt Mike squeeze her hand.

"You okay?" he asked quietly. El nodded. "You're sure? If you're uncomfortable we don't have to—"

El loved him for that, for offering to turn away from something she knew he'd been looking forward to for ages. She covered his mouth with a hand. "Promise," she said, and he smiled.

"Come on then," he said, and led her to the middle of the crowd, where people were dancing. She turned and faced Mike, and, like Joyce had taught her, stepped close and put her hand on his shoulder. His own hand came to her waist, and the fluttery feeling from before came back, only ten times stronger.

She tried to ignore it so she could remember what to do. *Sway to the music*, she told herself, and listened. It was a relatively slow song; tinkly and light and reminding her of Christmas. Mike started to move, and she followed him, stepping so she remained facing him.

One step, two steps. One step, two steps. El started to grow accustomed to the rhythm and her nervousness faded and she felt herself beginning to relax. She could see why people liked to dance now, as she gazed into Mike's laughing face and the fluttery feeling spread through her body. But before she knew it the song was over, and El stared around, confused.

"It's over?" It had only lasted a few minutes! But no sooner were the words out of her mouth than the next song started. Mike chuckled at her reaction, and she put her hand back on his shoulder and started to dance again.

1 hour later

The most recent song faded out, and for a moment El shut her eyes and just breathed, relishing in the sound of a hundred whispering students, the way the colorful lights flashed through her closed

eyelids, the feeling of Mike's hand on her waist. Then the next song started and her eyes snapped open as a ragged cheer arose from the crowd.

She *knew* this one. It was "Dancing in the Dark", by Bruce Springsteen — Mike's favorite song by Mike's favorite musician. She looked at him and saw his wide, excited grin and smiled back, grabbing his free hand with hers and starting to dance again, going much faster than the last song. She liked the beat to this one, it felt... bouncy? There was no other way to describe it. Her head was close to Mike's and she loved the way his face was flushed with heat and joy.

I get up in the evening,

And I ain't got nothing to say.

She didn't break eye contact, not even to blink. She had never noticed how dark his eyes were. It made her heart race.

I come home in the morning,

I go to bed feeling the same way!

She didn't know or care much how Bruce Springsteen was feeling, but she knew that she wanted to kiss Mike right there and then, more than she had ever wanted anything in her life.

I ain't nothin' but tired,

Man I'm just tired and bored with myself.

But she couldn't, not with all these people around; she knew from experience kissing in public drew attention and at the moment the only person whose attention she wanted was Mike's.

Hey there baby,

I could use just a little help.

She felt herself leaning closer to him, she couldn't help it, she was being pulled by an invisible force that she couldn't control even if she had wanted to. Which she didn't particularly.

You can't start a fire,

Can't start a fire without a spark.

A spark! El closed her eyes. Reached out with her mind.

This gun's for hire...

She felt that familiar tugging sensation and a brief flash of pain in her head.

Even if we're just dancing in the dark.

With a sizzling hiss, all the lights went out. El opened her eyes and it barely made a difference to her sight. The only light came from the moon, shining in through the windows. People were booing, yelling for the lights to come back. There were some shouts of surprise, followed quickly by apologies as people accidentally stepped on each other's feet or walked into each other in the dark.

Mike, blinking rapidly against the sudden darkness, felt El slide forward in his arms. Her short hair tickled his neck as she whispered, right in his ear.

"Come." She turned and, holding onto his hand, started to make her way out of the auditorium. Mike, who could barely see a thing, allowed her to guide him through the crowd.

"Sorry, everyone, we don't know what happened. Circuits must've fried, we'll get them back as soon as possible," the student council president called. El continued to lead Mike through the room.

"El?"

"Mike?"

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see," she said, and he could hear the smile in her voice. They reached the exit and, hidden in the darkness, slipped out of the open doors and into the hallway, where the lights were still on. Now that he could see, Mike noticed that a trickle of blood was running from

El's nose onto her upper lip. He took out the handkerchief he carried with him for this specific purpose and gently mopped up the flow.

"Thanks," El murmured.

"Why'd you do that? Didn't you like the dance?" Mike asked, concerned.

El shook her head and smiled. "I did. It was fun." She glanced up at him, suddenly shy, and bit her lip. "I wanted to kiss you."

Mike broke into a grin and squeezed her in a tight embrace, feeling his heart soar. "Oh. Why don't you, then?"

She did. Gently at first, then harder. It only lasted a second before she pulled away, both of them flushed and breathing hard. "Come," she said again, and once more took Mike by the hand, pulling him behind her as she walked. She turned them down the hall and turned into the lobby before exiting out the front doors.

"That's it? You want to leave?" asked a bemused and somewhat regretful Mike.

El nodded. "I want to show you something," she told him, then shivered slightly. Mike was struck with the realization that, despite the night being shockingly warm for early December (he had heard on the news it was in the low 60s), El was only wearing a thin dress.

"Here," he said, taking his jacket off and draping it over her slender shoulders. A small part of him was a little disappointed that her exposed shoulders were no longer visible to him, but he scolded himself mentally for the selfish thought. El's comfort took priority.

"Thank you," she said with a grateful smile, squeezing his hand as they continued to walk. She led him off the road, past the bike racks and parking lot, and into the woods. Hawkins Middle was located on a hill, with another, slightly larger one sloping up directly to the left. That was where she brought them now, up the grassy slope to the very top. Then she stopped, turning to face Mike but not relinquishing her hold on his hand.

Mike looked around. "This is what you wanted to show me?" he asked

her. She pointed up at the night sky.

"Stars," she said.

He followed her gaze, staring vertically into the inky blackness. "Sta
— **MMPH!**"

The last sound was forced out of him as El crashed into him, pressing her lips to his own with a fierce passion and wrapping her slim arms around his neck, and within seconds Mike forgot all about stars and the dance on the hill below them.

Two hours later

Jonathan pushed through the crowd in the now music-less auditorium and shook his head. "I couldn't find them anywhere. Could you?"

Nancy mirrored the action, shaking her own head. "They must've gone home early," she said.

Jonathan frowned. "That's weird. I saw them a couple times and they seemed to be enjoying themselves. And would they go home without telling us?"

"Maybe they got tired?" Nancy suggested.

"Maybe," her boyfriend replied, not sounding convinced. "Well, I'll drop you off at your place and we'll check there."

He led her to his car and opened the door for her, bowing and gesturing flamboyantly. "After you, madam," he said graciously. Nancy laughed and punched him in the arm playfully before sliding in. Jonathan got in the driver's seat a second later, rubbing his arm and smiling.

"You hit hard," he commented. She just stuck her tongue out at him.

"Let's go, stupid."

Jonathan, grinning, held up his hands in surrender and started pulling out of the parking lot. Down the hill they went, driving for

another five minutes before they arrived at the Wheeler's house.

He followed Nancy to the door. She unlocked it and looked back at him with an eyebrow raised.

"Following me in, Byers? A more suspicious person than me might think you're up to no good."

Jonathan laughed. "Shut up, Wheeler. I'm just hear to make sure your brother didn't elope with my little sister, then I'm gone."

They entered the dark house, and Nancy flicked on the lights, hoping it wouldn't wake her sleeping parents. Jonathan walked to Mike's room, preparing to knock, but the door was already open. He peeked in. The room was empty.

He felt the blood drain from his face. He whirled to face Nancy. "He's not there!" he said urgently.

She looked unperturbed. "Okay."

"Okay?" Jonathan repeated. "Your brother is gone!"

She snorted with laughter. "He's not home. He's not 'gone'. I'm sure he's fine. Hawkins isn't very big and Mike's fifteen. He won't get lost."

"Did you forget what happened to *my* brother two years ago?" Jonathan said, his voice rising in volume.

"Did you forget he has a girlfriend with superpowers?" Nancy retorted. "If Mike's not here, he's definitely with her. El can look after the both of them just fine."

Jonathan conceded, nodding reluctantly. "Well, true..." Then the color that had come back to his face drained again suddenly. "Oh, god..."

Nancy sighed and repressed a smile, knowing the realization he had just come to. "What now?"

"You don't think they're..." He trailed off, unable to finish the sentence.

Nancy smiled innocently. "They're what?" She didn't even feel remotely bad for torturing him.

Jonathan was bright red. "You don't think they're... doing anything, do you?" He clamped his eyes shut and groaned. "Ahhh, this is bad. Hopper's going to murder me if they're..." he shook his head several times, hard. "No, no, no, not going to think about it."

Nancy was giggling at the ridiculous sight. "The thought never crossed your mind? I thought you were checking to see if they were... what was it? 'Eloping together?'"

"I was *joking* when I said that! They're fifteen, Nance! *Fifteen!*"

"We were sixteen."

"That year makes a difference!"

"Does it?" When he didn't answer, Nancy put a hand over his and spoke in a more serious tone. "Jonathan, think about it. They've been together for two years. They fought an inter-dimensional monster and government agents together when they were *twelve*, and now you're worried that they might be *having sex*? Which, by the way, we don't even know if they're doing."

Jonathan knew her logic was sound, but he was too stubborn to admit it. "I hope they're not. I really, really hope—"

"Oh, shut up, Byers," Nancy said, kissing him. "You have bigger things to worry about right now."

"Such as?" he replied, pulling away.

"Me," she suggested, grabbing his hand and pulling him upstairs. Before he even knew what was happening, she was pushing him down onto her bed and locking the door. She climbed on top of him, kissing him hard. His hands found themselves on her hips, massaging the skin through the thin fabric of her dress.

He stopped. "I hope that they're not doing what we are right now." He shut his eyes against the image.

"Jonathan?"

"Yeah?"

"Shut up."

A/N: OOOOO BOYYYY WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT HILL? DID THEY DO IT? ARE JONATHAN'S WORST FEARS CONFIRMED?
HMMMMMM~

Obligatory over and out!

4. On a Hill

A/N: Hey all! Sorry for the delay on this chapter. I've been so overloaded with schoolwork lately, it's been hard to keep my head above water. On the bright side, there was actually more to this chapter than what you're seeing right now, but it ended up dragging, so I cut it. But what that means is I already have half a chapter extra, so the next one can (hopefully) come soon! Woo! Thanks, as always, for all the feedback. It's welcome and super appreciated. Enjoy!

"And there, that's Sagittarius, see?"

"Sag-itt-ar..."

"Sagittarius. It's a constellation."

"Constellation?"

"Yeah, they're like pictures made of stars. You can only see them at certain times during the year."

"Who makes them?"

"Nobody, really. I guess people just looked up at the stars one day and thought they looked liked something."

"What does sag-itt-ar-i-us look like?"

"Well, it's supposed to be a centaur, but it's kind of hard to tell unless you really know what you're looking for."

"Centaur?"

"A centaur is a made-up animal. It's a horse's body with a guy's torso, arms and head where the neck should be. Weird, right?"

They had been up here for what felt like forever. Mike had no clue exactly how many hours; after awhile they seemed to blend together. He was only conscious of the girl lying pressed up against his side,

her head on his shoulder as she looked up at the stars.

"I love looking at the night sky," he said softly. "It's so peaceful, you know?"

He felt El nod, nestling closer to his chest.

"Mike?" she said after another minute of silence.

"Yeah?"

"Is love the same as like?"

Mike thought for a moment, chewing the inside of his cheek thoughtfully. "Kind of," he told her. "They're similar, but love is a lot... stronger. When you love something, you like it too. Only a lot more."

She made a confused noise in her throat. "So, you love looking at the sky? More than like?"

Mike laughed softly. "No, not really. I enjoy it, a lot, but it was just a figure of speech. Or an exaggeration. Love is reserved for really special things. Like family, and..." he trailed off, glancing at her sidelong.

"And what?" she prompted. Mike shook his head.

"Never mind."

"How do you know if you love instead of like?" El asked.

"Well..." Mike shrugged slightly. "If you love someone, they're your favorite person to be around. When you're with them, everything else becomes better and you feel all warm and... complete, I guess." He frowned after a second. "Sorry, that wasn't a very good explanation."

She shook her head. "I understand," she assured him, gazing up at the bright white moon.

Mike smiled, closing his eyes and relaxing. After another minute he checked his watch and let out a regretful sigh. "El, I hate to say it, but

we should probably be getting back soon. It's way past midnight." He pushed himself to his feet, stretching, and suddenly realizing how long they'd been lying here. He groaned quietly at the stiffness of his muscles, jumping up and down to loosen them up.

El blinked up at him lazily and extended a hand. He grasped it and pulled her to her feet. Unprepared for the sudden force, El shrieked in surprise and fell into Mike's arms, giggling. He smiled and poked her, stepping back but keeping ahold of her hand.

"Come on, you," he said. "I bet our moms are freaking out right now." He shook his head in apprehension at the prospect of dealing with his parents, who would probably be seething at his lateness.

Then he looked over at the girl walking down the hill beside him, hand in his, skin silvery in the moonlight, and suddenly he didn't care that he was going to get told off. Spending time with El was worth any amount of harsh words and punishment.

Mike had said goodbye to El outside her house, and now, standing outside his own front door, he took a deep breath and steeled himself. Stepping inside, he walked into the living room and braced for harsh words. Then he looked around in shock. Nobody was there.

Normally, this wouldn't be a surprise. His parents usually went to bed much earlier than this. But Mike knew from experience that if he wasn't home at a reasonable hour, they would be all too happy to stay up and shout themselves hoarse at him. Particularly after Will's disappearance.

Mike spotted a piece of paper on the coffee table. He picked it up. It read *FOR MIKE* on the front, underlined twice and circled.

Mike~

I told Mom and Dad this morning that the dance didn't end until midnight. That's why they're asleep right now instead of waiting to jump your ass. Just be thankful that I think ahead and that I'm willing to lie for you, little bro, because otherwise, you'd be screwed right about now. You owe me one.

—N

Mike grinned ruefully to himself and rubbed his face, grateful that his sister had more foresight than he did. Making a mental note to thank her tomorrow morning, Mike threw the letter in the garbage (taking a moment to first shred it into pieces, just in case) and tiptoed upstairs to his room, changed, washed up, and fell asleep within a matter of minutes. He hadn't realized how tired he was.

The next morning Mike woke feeling groggy. He checked the clock next to his bed. 9:30. He jumped up, panicking, before remembering that there was no school the day after the Snowball. Heaving a sigh of relief, he changed into a t-shirt, sweater and jeans before making his way downstairs. The smell of frying bacon and strong coffee hit his nostrils, making his mouth water.

"Hey, honey!" his mom greeted him with a smile. "How was the dance? Did you come home late?"

"Uh, not too late. It was really fun, but I got tired," he fibbed, shooting a glance at Nancy. She was deliberately avoiding his gaze, reading a newspaper and sipping coffee loudly. He plopped into the chair next to her and made a show of stretching, arching his back so his head was right next to her ear.

"Thanks," he breathed, so quietly his parents didn't hear. He was answered with the tiniest of nods.

"Well, that's great, sweetie. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," his mom said, sliding a plate piled high with eggs, bacon, and toast in front of him. "And El? Did she have fun too?"

Mike reddened slightly. Karen knew of his relationship with El (how could she not?) and approved of it, which came as a surprise for him at the beginning. He was endlessly grateful that she was so accepting, but it was still undeniably awkward to talk about his girlfriend with his own mother.

"Yeah, Mike, did El enjoy herself?" Nancy added, smiling innocently.

"Yeah, she did," he replied evenly, glaring at his sister. She

suppressed a snicker and took a bite of toast. Karen went to the kitchen to pour herself some more coffee, and Nancy took the opportunity to lean over and whisper in Mike's ear.

"Glad I got you the condoms now?"

Mike choked on his bacon. "What the— NO! We were just hanging out on the hill near school, you perv!" he whispered fiercely back.

"Seriously?" Nancy rolled her eyes in exasperation and disbelief. "You have that opportunity and you don't take it? Are you sure you're a fifteen year old boy?"

"Are you sure you're a—"

"What are you two bickering about now?" their mom sighed, sitting back down at the table. Both kids straightened up.

"Nothing," they said in unison. Karen looked from Mike to Nancy and shook her head slightly.

"Well," she said. "I was just saying that your father and I are going to be out of town tonight, but I don't think either of you were listening. We're going to do some shopping and then we'll stay the night at Richie and Emma's, since we haven't seen them in awhile." Richie and Emma were childhood friends of hers, Mike knew. "Will you guys be okay alone?"

"We'll be fine, Mom," Nancy assured her.

"Can I bring my friends over?" Mike asked excitedly. His sister groaned.

"I don't see why not, as long as you guys don't trash the house," Karen replied after a moment's consideration. Nancy finished her coffee, scraped the last of her food into the garbage, and headed for the front door.

"Well, in that case, I'll be at Jonathan's. Call him if you need me." The door shut behind her. Mike snorted to himself, watching her leave out the front window.

Hypocrite, he thought.

"...and the Nycadaemon staggers to its knees. It hisses at you one more time before sizzling into a pile of glowing ash." Mike stretched. "Good job, guys."

"Hell yeah!" Dustin high-fived Lucas and slapped Will on the back. He even hugged El, who wasn't playing but was observing with interest, as she always did when they played D&D.

"That was a great campaign, Mike," Will said. "You've really improved over the years, you know that?"

"Thanks, Will," Mike replied with a grin. They had been playing for most of the evening, and Mike glanced out the window to see that the sky was pitch black. Since his parents weren't home, they were able to stay up late. "You guys are all sleeping over, right?" Mike asked.

"I am," Lucas answered. Dustin nodded, indicating that he could, too. Mike looked at Will and El.

"And you two?" he prompted.

"Yep," said Will cheerfully. "Jonathan was really happy to hear we would be. If I didn't know better I'd think he wanted us out of the house."

Dustin raised an eyebrow. "Isn't Nancy there?"

Will reddened. "Uh, yeah. But they wouldn't be..." He gestured vaguely with his hands.

"Why not?" Lucas asked, grinning at Will's embarrassment. "What else would they be doing in a house alone all day?"

"Maybe— maybe they're watching a movie?" Will suggested weakly. Lucas just shrugged and spread his hands, as though to say *think what you want*.

Mike cleared his throat, rescuing Will from the situation. "Are you guys going to shower before bed?"

Will jumped up at the opportunity and nodded over-enthusiastically. "Oh, yeah, I was just about to, actually!" he said hastily, and half-jogged out of the room, followed by Dustin and Lucas's sniggers.

El smiled, watching her foster brother's receding form. She knew, at this point, what the boys were talking about whenever they dodged around a direct subject like this. She didn't entirely understand, though, why they avoided saying the word *sex* directly, and why it would inevitably end up embarrassing at least one of the boys. Why was it so taboo? They could talk about kissing just fine. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that sex was "more extreme" than kissing like Mike had said.

Mr. Clarke had explained to her how it worked, though she didn't remember all the strange complicated words he had used. She knew something from the guy went into something else from the girl and apparently it felt really good and sometimes made a baby, but it was difficult to conjure up an image based on that.

Suddenly she realized Mike was trying to speak to her. "El?" he was saying. "Do you want to shower in the other bathroom?"

"Okay," she replied. It was very important to shower every day, Joyce had taught her. Even in the bad place, Papa had ensured that she got sprayed down with soapy water every morning and every night, to "avoid contamination". It was not a particularly pleasant experience, so El had not been looking forward to washing daily. But it turned out showering was different. El liked it. It was relaxing to stand in the hot water and made her feel all fresh and sleepy afterwards.

She climbed the basement stairs, walking past the bathroom Will was currently occupying, then ascended another flight of stairs in the living room. She entered the second floor bathroom, looking around appreciatively. El liked this room. The floor tiles were pink and shiny and there were butterfly decorations on the mirror. She suspected Nancy may have had a hand in picking out the aesthetic.

Stripping off her clothes, El set the water to the temperature just where she liked it. The complicated levers had confused her at first, but Karen and Nancy had been patient, always reminding her which one was hot and which one was cold, and eventually she had gotten

the hang of it. She waited until she could see steam rising from the flow of water, then stepped into the jets, sighing in appreciation at the hot water.

El rubbed shampoo into her short hair, observing with interest the way it foamed on her hand. She stepped into the jet of water and, squeezing her eyes shut, tilted her head back, rinsing the frothy white stuff from her hair. She reached for the bottle of conditioner when the sound of a knock on the door made her jump, knocking it off the shower rack.

"El?" she heard Mike's voice call from behind the closed door. "I'm just gonna brush my teeth quickly. I tried Will's bathroom but he locked the door. Is it okay if I come in?" He sounded bizarrely hesitant, almost strained.

"Yes," El replied. She heard the sound of the door opening, then shutting a second later. Suddenly she became conscious of the fact that she was completely naked, hidden from Mike only by the thin cloth of the shower curtain. The realization made her feel hot and tingly all over, in a way she had never felt before. Her heart was racing.

Mike's was, too. He was glad El couldn't see him, because he was pretty sure his face was an unflattering shade of bright red at the moment. El — pretty, innocent, wonderful El — was completely naked behind that thin sheet of fabric. He could see her clothes flung over the towel rack off to the side.

It was driving him mad. Teenage hormones were doing crazy things to his head (and other places) and Mike knew he needed to get out of the room, *fast*. He picked up his toothbrush and shoved it into his mouth too forcefully. It jabbed the back of his throat, making him cough. He started brushing vigorously

El stood still for a moment, the hot water spraying on the top of her head. It seemed like only a second had passed before she heard Mike's voice again.

"Okay, I'm done," he called, and she heard his footsteps going toward the door. But El didn't want that, she realized suddenly. She didn't

want that one bit.

Mike reached for the doorknob, still blushing. *El's naked. In a room. With me. And nobody else.* The thought kept repeating over and over in his head. He felt guilty for a moment, then shoved the emotion aside. It was only natural to feel the way he was feeling, he told himself. He was, like Nancy had said, a fifteen year old boy. And El was his girlfriend now. It would be wrong for him *not* to want to... do things to her.

Wouldn't it?

He shook himself, seized the knob, and twisted. It was stuck. He frowned and tried again. Still locked. This door didn't even *have* a lock, though, unlike the other bathroom. What was going on?

"Mike."

He turned and his eyes shot wide open. She was peering around the curtain, and the right side of her body was in plain view to him. His eyes traced the lines of her bare shoulder, the gentle curve of her waist and hip. Her chest was, thankfully, hidden (Mike would've said he was thankful, anyway). "E-El? What are you doing?"

She glanced shyly away and bit her lip before looking back at him, all soft brown eyes and maddening innocence. "Stay?"

"Uhm." Mike opened and closed his mouth several times, trying to find his voice. It stubbornly evaded him.

El tilted her head. "Mike?"

"No. No no no! No, El, we can't—we shouldn't—" he took a deep breath, in and out. "That's—not a good idea."

The look on her face hurt his heart. Her eyebrows were pushed together and her mouth turned down at the corner visible to him. "You don't want to stay?" she asked quietly.

"No, that's not what I meant!" Mike shouted, too loud. Deep breath. In and out. He couldn't control the blush he knew was spreading across his cheeks. "Of course I want to. But the guys, they're downstairs..."

She probably doesn't even know what she's asking.

"Please?" She was reddening, too.

Oh my god, she does know.

Mike said nothing. He tried not to look at her, but his eyes couldn't stay away. The sight of El, dripping with water, teasingly outlined behind the curtain, skin flushed from the heat, was undeniably alluring. And, damn it, at the moment his body was speaking a lot louder than his mind.

"O-kay," he whispered, more to himself than her.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I come out now?"

"...Yeah. You can come out."

A/N: So this is where I ask your opinion, guys. I left out the explicit stuff, because this is a rated T fanfic. But I've already gotten a couple PMs asking if there will ever be more ~mature~ scenes, so I'm asking now: would you guys be interested in seeing that? Or do you prefer the Mileven relationship staying all pure? If you have an opinion on the matter, be sure to shoot me a PM or comment. Thanks so much for reading, and as always...

Over and out!

5. Shower

Hey, all! So there's no actual chapter here, but if you were looking forward to one, don't be disappointed. Chapter 5 has been uploaded in another fanfic called Sex Ed Chapter 5: Shower. It's rated M, hence why I uploaded in a separate fic. So if you're good with mature stuff, head on over there and get reading! If you're not, all I can do is apologize and say that the next non-M rated chapter will be up soon. And if you don't want to, then don't feel pressured to read Chapter 5 for story purposes - Chapter 6 will not contain anything that you need Chap. 5 to understand. Also, even though it should be obvious at this point, I am obligated to warn you that Chap. 5 contains explicit sexual content. Steer clear if you're not a fan. You have been warned.

Cheers, and enjoy!

6. Aftermath

"What's taking Mike so long?" Lucas wondered, sprawled in a squashy armchair.

Dustin shrugged. "He said he was going to brush his teeth," the curly haired boy replied idly, examining one of the D&D figurines.

"He's been up there for, like, thirty minutes," Lucas pointed out.
"Actually, more than that. Who takes that long to brush their teeth?"

"Maybe he's really constipated?" Dustin suggested.

Lucas snorted with laughter. "What, in the bathroom while Will's showering? Thanks for that image, Henderson, really needed that."

"No problem. I live to serve."

Just then the door to the basement opened. The pair looked up, expecting to see Mike, but it was Will, hair plastered to his head from the shower. He saw them looking and raised his eyebrows.

"What?" he asked.

"Was Mike brushing his teeth in the bathroom while you were in there?" Lucas wanted to know.

Will shook his head. "No, the door was locked. If he knocked I guess I didn't hear him. Why?"

Lucas and Dustin looked at each other.

"You don't think..." Dustin began, and Lucas shook his head vehemently before he could finish his sentence.

"Nope nope nope nope. Not thinking about it. I'm going to shower now. Hopefully I won't run into anything traumatizing on the way to the bathroom." He threw open the door to the basement and padded out, stance set and rigid.

Will stared Dustin. "You think something happened to him while he

was brushing his teeth?" he asked, sounding incredulous but slightly worried.

Dustin rolled his eyes and sighed dramatically, placing a hand on Will's shoulder. "You know, Will, sometimes I wonder how you only ever hang out with us but you're still as innocent as you are."

"I'm innocent?" Will asked, bewildered. "But what—" his face fell. "Oh. Oh god, no. Dustin, *no!* That's gross, she's my *sister*, they wouldn't be doing—"

The door opened again and Mike walked into the basement. Will turned to Dustin, the relief showing on his face.

"There, see, he's here now!" he said, relaxing.

"Think again," Dustin replied, pointing. Will looked and turned a delicate shade of green. El had entered the room right behind her boyfriend, and was now curling up on the couch next to him. She looked so *content* that Dustin and Will could immediately tell something was off.

"Hey guys," Mike chirped, trying to act casual and failing miserably. He was quite visibly bursting with energy and excitement. Will, who was usually the most mild-mannered of the group, felt a sudden urge to punch his friend in the face. Not hard enough to do real damage, but enough to hurt.

"What were you doing?" Dustin demanded bluntly.

Mike reddened and glanced at El, who seemed unperturbed. "Brushing my teeth," he answered shortly.

"Brushing your teeth," Dustin repeated.

"Yes." Mike glared at him, daring him to continue.

"For half an hour."

"I lost the toothpaste," Mike blurted out without thinking. He winced as he realized just how lame it sounded.

Dustin just stared at him. "You lost the toothpaste," he repeated again, slowly.

"Yeah, I had to... go out and get some. I biked to the store." Mike was cringing at every word coming out of his mouth.

"What, without telling us?" Dustin snorted, grinning now.

"I shouted. I don't know how you didn't hear me," Mike lied.

Dustin raised an eyebrow disbelievingly. "Right," he said. "Got it." He glanced at Will, who was looking somewhat ill and refusing to meet his gaze.

Unbearably awkward silence persisted for another few minutes before Lucas came out of the shower. Strolling back into the basement, he greeted Mike. "Oh, there you are!"

"Lucas!" Dustin leapt to his feet and, running to the other boy, put both hands on his shoulders. "Which shower were you using? This is important!"

Lucas stared at him. "What?"

"Just answer me!"

"Uh... the one Will was using. El was in the other one, wasn't she?"

Dustin sighed, looking relieved, and released him. "Oh, thank god."

Lucas squinted at him suspiciously. "Why?"

"Because," the other boy said victoriously, grinning and pointing at Mike and El. "Those two were just screwing in the one on the second floor."

"DUSTIN!" Mike howled in protest.

"Oh Jesus..." Lucas looked like he didn't know whether to laugh or run.

"Don't deny it, Mike," Dustin said loudly, looking triumphant. "You're

a terrible liar, you know that?"

"No! I—" Mike stared around at the other boys, looking like a cornered wild animal. His voice stuck as he tried and failed to think of a suitable response. Sitting by his side, El looked conflicted. Dustin saw her expression and jumped on it.

"El, was Mike really brushing his teeth?" he asked her, and as she opened her mouth, he added quickly, "Friends don't lie, remember?"

Mike glared at Dustin, placing a hand on El's arm to stop her. "Why are you asking her?"

"Why shouldn't I?" the other boy shot back. "She's her own person, and she's entitled to her own response, aren't you, El?"

She nodded uncertainly, and Dustin leaned forward eagerly. "So?" he pressed.

Mike stared at her pleadingly. *Don't do this*, his eyes begged. But friends don't lie, he had told her. El looked at Dustin. "We sexed," she said simply.

Lucas made a strange barking sound that could've been congratulatory or disgusted. Dustin cheered and clapped. Will silently tipped over and lay facedown on the carpet.

"ABOUT DAMN TIME!" Dustin roared approvingly, thumping his friend on the back, and Mike, who had been giving El a look of utmost hurt, grinned guiltily and looked at the floor. "WE GOTTA CELEBRATE, GUYS!"

He thundered upstairs. They heard the sound of the fridge door slamming and Dustin returned a minute later, arms piled high with soda cans. He started tossing them to the group. Lucas and Mike caught theirs. El didn't even reach for hers; she just levitated it down into her open hand. Will's bounced off the back of his head but he didn't seem to notice.

Dustin flopped onto the armchair across from the couch Mike and El were occupying. "So, what, you guys had this all planned out?"

Mike's cheeks were burning. "We didn't! It just..." He blew out air, wishing that he could change the subject but knowing that Lucas and Dustin would not allow it. "It just kind of happened."

"It just kind of happened," Lucas parroted in a high, dreamy voice, popping open his soda. "Sure, man. You two are gross." Despite his words, though, Lucas was smiling. After El had saved their lives and killed the demogorgon, he had felt endlessly guilty for alienating her and constantly calling her a freak. He had tried to make it up to her by being accepting of her relationship with Mike. Now, two years later, he was a staunch supporter of their relationship — though he would never admit it out loud.

"Care for a reenactment?" Dustin asked innocently. El looked at Mike for his approval. He choked on his soda.

"Seriously, man?" he sputtered, red-faced from a mixture of coughing and embarrassment. "*We're* the gross ones?"

"Just kidding," Dustin assured him, grinning. "Though El clearly wasn't against the idea."

El nodded seriously. "I liked it," she informed them.

Dustin was unable to contain a snicker. "Yeah?"

Another nod. "Yes. It felt good." Mike had his head in his hands and Lucas and Dustin were choking on giggles. El didn't notice, though, and continued. "We will do it every day forever."

Lucas and Dustin were unable to hold back any longer. The basement was suddenly filled with their roars of laughter. Mike looked panic-stricken.

"No! El, I didn't say that..."

She looked hurt. "You said you wanted to."

"No! I didn't mean— I don't— well..." Mike waved his hands frantically, but it was too late.

"Oh, my god." Dustin's eyes were shining like his birthday had come

early. "Mike said that, El?"

At this point, the girl was regretting speaking up. She glanced between Mike and Dustin, then shrugged and tucked her knees up to her chest, staring at the floor.

"That's as good as a yes," Lucas pointed out, and Dustin shook his head in stunned awe.

"Damn, Mike," he said gleefully. "There's just a whole other side to you that we don't get to see, isn't there?"

"Shut up, Dustin."

Dustin held up his hands and took a step back, grinning. He opened his mouth to reply, but he stopped, suddenly noticing Will's prone form on the carpet.

"You alive, bud?" he asked, prodding Will with a toe.

"No."

El looked up, scared, then realized he wouldn't be saying anything if he was actually dead. She relaxed and watched her foster brother with interest. "What happened to him?" she asked curiously, observing the way he was lying face-down on the floor.

"He's traumatized," Lucas replied, kneeling down next to Will and patting his back.

"Trau-ma-tized?" El tried to sound out the unfamiliar word, wrinkling her brow.

"It means when you're, like, in shock from something bad that happened. Like if you just found out your friend and your sister were having sex in the shower one floor above you," Dustin explained.

"He *did* just find out," El pointed out, not understanding the joke. "That is why he is traumatized?"

Dustin nodded, completely straight-faced. "Yep. So now we have to fix him before he gets PTSD. That's like a condition that you get from

being traumatized."

El's eyes widened. "How do we fix him?"

"Well, maybe if we just..." Dustin squatted down next to Will and pinched his arm, hard.

"OWDUSTINWHATTHEHELL—"

"I think that did the trick," Dustin said, jumping back to avoid Will's flailing arms. The small boy sat up and glared at him.

"That *hurt*," he said accusingly.

Dustin shrugged. "Sorry. We thought you were in shock." He glanced at El and winked.

"I was. I am." Will stood shakily and pointed a finger at Mike and El. "I can't believe either of you."

Mike mumbled something indecipherable and looked at the floor. El stared at Will, surprised that her brother, usually so calm and good-natured, could get like this.

"Easy, Will," Lucas said, placing a calming hand on his shoulder and hiding a grin.

"No!" Will shook his friend's hand off and glared at the two on the couch. "They need to—to apologize, or—"

"How would that work?" Dustin chuckled and made air quotes with his fingers. "Oh Will, I'm so sorry that I made hot, passionate love to my girlfriend who also happens to be your sister," he cried in a high, dramatic tone, falling to one knee and clasping his hands together. "Please forgive me?" Lucas laughed but Will just groaned.

"I'm going to bed," he said, turning and marching away with his nose in the air. "See you all in the morning." The basement door slammed behind him and they heard his footsteps receding up the stairs. Dustin, Lucas, El, and Mike all looked at each other.

"Oops," said Dustin after a long pause.

"Why does Will hate us now?" El asked, eyes round with worry.

Lucas laughed. "He doesn't, he'll get over it by tomorrow morning. Don't worry about him."

Dustin shook his head wonderingly. "He surprised me there, to be honest. I've never seen Will get like that. If it was anyone else I'd say he was jealous of Mike, but..." Dustin shrugged.

"Jealous?" Mike exclaimed, stiffening. "Will doesn't *like* El!" He paused. "Does he?"

El's eyes widened. Will, liking her in that way? That wasn't possible. *Mike* liked her. And anyway Will was her brother.

Dustin snorted. "Obviously not, you dolt," he scoffed, and Mike and El both relaxed. "I don't think she's Will's... type." He exchanged a glance with Lucas.

"I'm not his type?" El asked, tilting her head.

"It means you're not the kind of girl he'd have a crush on," Mike explained. "Everyone's particular about who they like."

"I don't think *any* girl is the type of person Will would have a crush on," Lucas said dryly. "I mean, come on."

"You think?" Mike asked thoughtfully. Dustin snorted.

"It's pretty obvious, Mike. Remember that guy last year... what was his name? Noah or Nigel or something—"

"Nathan Ziegler," Lucas chipped in helpfully.

"Right, him." Dustin nodded. "Anyway, remember how shy Will was around him? He would always turn red and mumble something about having to go whenever he came near. And he always changed the subject when we asked about it."

"I always figured that was just because Will was uncomfortable near the really popular kids," Mike admitted. "But yeah, I guess you may be right."

El was looking from Mike to Dustin to Lucas with a furrowed brow. "Will liked Nathan?" she asked, tilting her head. "But he is a boy."

Mike smiled at her confusion. "Sometimes people like other people of the same gender," he explained. "It's not super common and it's not a big deal or anything. But a lot of the time they don't admit it right away because they're afraid people won't approve. I guess Will feels the same way, for whatever reason."

"But you said it wasn't a big deal," El pointed out.

"To us, it isn't," Lucas told her. "We could care less who somebody likes. But some people think it's weird and they make fun of it. Like Troy and James."

"Mouth-breathers," El supplied, and Lucas nodded. "So if he is not jealous, why is he angry?" she asked.

Dustin chewed his lip thoughtfully. "I think he's just protective, really."

"Protective of me?"

"Yep."

"From Mike?" She looked over at him in confusion.

"From anyone. You're his sister now, you know? And Christ, El, you just did it with one of his best friends. He's probably just surprised. Like Lucas said, just give him some time. He'll be fine by tomorrow morning." Dustin smiled reassuringly and El nodded.

"Okay," she said.

There was another minute of silence before Lucas frowned suddenly.

"Guys?" he said, and they all looked at him. "Did you shower again after you were done?"

"Uhm..." Mike glanced at El nervously. "Ah, no. No, we didn't." He fidgeted awkwardly.

"Oh, god." Dustin, who had sat down on the couch next to them, jumped up immediately and backed away. "That's foul."

"Gross," Lucas muttered, snickering. "Really gross. Go clean yourselves up."

Mike nodded several times and stood, helping El to her feet. He hastily walked to the door leading upstairs and started to climb, followed by Dustin's parting shout.

"And do it separately this time, you horny little shits!"

A/N: Big thank you to everyone who gave feedback for Chapter 5. I wasn't feeling super confident about it so your comments helped out a bunch. And as always, thanks for reading and reviewing. Cheers!

7. Morning

When Mike awoke the next morning, he became immediately conscious of three things. One, he was completely naked; two, El's arms were wrapped around him; and three, by the feeling of her chest against his back, she was naked too.

The events of the previous night came flooding back to him and Mike felt his face heating up slightly at the memory — both what happened in the shower, and what happened afterwards, when they had gone upstairs to "sleep." Suffice to say, sleep came, but only after several more frantic and somewhat noisy minutes that left both of them panting and sweaty and exhausted. Afterwards, they had collapsed onto Mike's bed in a tangle of bodies and limbs, chests heaving, tired but satisfied. They had fallen asleep like that, in each other's arms, happy as two people could possibly be.

Mike gently extracted himself from El's arms and sat up, moving slowly so he didn't wake her. The bedroom was mostly dark, with the only light leaking in past the blinds on the window. Mike leaned over El and peered at the clock perched on the nightstand next to her bed. 8:27.

The guys are probably awake by now, Mike thought. He sighed, knowing he'd have to endure more teasing the moment he went downstairs. *Stalling won't make it any better.*

He reached over to shake El awake, but his hand stopped before he touched her shoulder. His breath caught in his throat when his eyes alighted on her face. Eyes closed, lashes kissing her delicate cheekbones, creamy skin smooth and unblemished, lips parted slightly. She looked so vulnerable, which was ridiculous considering she could break every bone in his body without lifting a finger if she wanted to. But even so. She was so damn pretty.

No. Pretty didn't cut it. Beautiful? Not the right word. Breathtaking seemed more fitting.

Mike couldn't resist running a thumb lightly over her soft bottom lip. The touch caused El to stir. Her eyelids fluttered and she shifted

slightly, letting out a small sigh. Mike squeezed her bare shoulder.

"Hey," he greeted quietly. Her chocolate brown eyes opened, blinking several times before blearily focusing on his face. Mike smiled at her and she blinked again.

"Hi," she mumbled sleepily before rolling over onto her stomach and shoving her face into a pillow. Mike chuckled and laid a hand on her back.

"Don't go back to sleep now. The guys are still here," he reminded her.

She groaned softly. "Fvh mrr minth," she said into the pillow.

"Huh?"

"Five more minutes." El flopped onto her back again, eyes half-open. The movement caused the blankets covering her to slide down dangerously far, threatening to reveal more than they should. Mike tucked them back up — for his own sake more than hers — and nodded indulgently.

"Alright. But then we have to go downstairs."

El curled up and extended a lazy hand toward him, peeking out from underneath the covers. "Hold me?" she requested.

"Sure." Mike slid over and gathered her up in his arms, lifting her onto his own body. She nuzzled his chest gently, letting out a contented sigh and closing her eyes. He rested a hand on her lower back and relaxed, trying to ignore the fact that her bare leg was slung over his waist, bringing her hips in extremely close proximity to his own.

The minutes passed too quickly. Mike stroked El's hair and lost himself in her scent and the feeling of her warm body on top of his. By the time he checked the clock again, twelve minutes had come and gone before he knew it. Mike sighed regretfully and kissed El on the top of the head.

"Come on," he said. "Time to get up." He tried to lift her off but she

resisted, hunkering down and wrapping her arms around his abdomen.

"Tired," she mumbled.

Mike grinned ruefully. "Yeah, I guess we didn't get too much sleep last night, huh?"

El lifted her head, resting her chin near his solar plexus, and smiled. "Other things to do," she said happily.

Mike laughed. "Yeah," he agreed. "More important things." He put a hand under each of her arms and moved her back onto the bed so he could sit up.

"Again, later?" El asked hopefully.

"Hell yeah," Mike told her. "Soon as the guys leave, if you really want." *What did I do to deserve a girlfriend this eager?* he wondered privately.

Her eyes brightened. "Okay." She threw the blankets off and crawled to the foot of the bed, stretching down to the floor where she had discarded her spare clothes the night before — and in doing so giving Mike a full view of her naked body, bending over shamelessly. He felt his own body reacting as any teenage boy's would, and, though he would have very much liked to keep looking, he quickly glanced away.

Need to keep a clear head, he told himself.

El retrieved her clothes from the ground and sat up on the bed, preparing to pull on a big purple t-shirt. Before she did, though, she glanced at Mike and saw his averted eyes. She stopped and frowned.

"Mike?"

"Hmm?" He kept his gaze turned pointedly away.

"Why don't you want to look at me?" She scooted forward, her face close to his so that he was unable to look away. His gaze flicked down to her chest before returning to her own eyes. "You were

looking last night," she reminded him.

Mike blushed. "It's, ah..." he swallowed. "I want to, believe me, but if I looked right now I don't think I could control myself."

El tilted her head. "Control yourself?"

"Like, you know, looking at you naked like this really makes me want to..." he gestured vaguely downward, toward her hips, and trailed off.

"Sex?" she supplied.

"...Yeah."

"Hmm." El's eyes glimmered with an uncharacteristic spark of mischief and suddenly her hand darted forward, snaking under the covers and grabbing him tightly. Mike yelped in surprise.

"El!" he exclaimed reproachfully, flinching and trying to pretend his reaction was one of pain. He quickly pulled her hand away before she could feel his instinctive response.

"Sorry," she giggled. She tried to straighten her face and look apologetic, failing miserably in the process. "You really do want to sex," she teased.

"Well, can you blame me when you're doing things like that?" Mike defended himself. He shook his head in despair. "What happened to all your innocence? Maybe Will was right to be angry at me."

El giggled again. She felt rather flattered.

It was several minutes later by the time the pair finally made it downstairs, both now fully clothed. When Mike entered the living room, he saw that all his friends were indeed awake. Lucas and Will were sprawled on the couch in front of the TV, engaged deep in conversation, and Dustin was in the kitchen, standing in front of the toaster. When he heard their footsteps coming down the stairs, he turned and raised a hand.

"Looks like the lovebirds are up," he called by way of greeting, flashing a toothless grin. "Sleep well?"

Mike and El exchanged a glance. "Well enough," Mike replied.

Dustin raised an eyebrow, but all he said was, "Glad to hear it." He winked. "I made breakfast, by the way." He stepped aside with a dramatic sweeping gesture, revealing several blueberry waffles sticking up out of the toaster.

El's eyes lit up. "Eggos?"

He nodded, grinning. "Happy lose-your-virginity day." He paused. "I guess that was yesterday, though, wasn't it?" Dustin frowned for a moment, then shrugged. "Oh well. Come eat."

El ran to Dustin and threw her arms around him. "Thank you," she said gratefully. She didn't know what virginity was and where she had lost it or how to find it, but she really liked Dustin, she decided. Maybe not as much as Mike, but still a lot. Dustin let out a startled laugh and patted her on the back.

"Uh, yeah, no problem." His eyes met Mike's over her shoulder and they both grinned. "Is this what you did, man? Seduced her with Eggos?"

Mike snorted with laughter. "Yeah, you got me," he said, walking to the kitchen table. El released Dustin and grabbed a waffle from the toaster before promptly dropping it.

"Hot," she announced, shaking her burned hand and glaring at the offending object.

"It just came out of the toaster," Dustin reminded her. "You should wait for it to cool off."

El stared at the waffle lying on the counter. It lifted slowly into the air before gliding onto one of the china plates on the table.

"Or you could do that, I guess," Dustin allowed, watching its progress. He turned toward the living room and raised his voice. "Hey, Lucas, Will, come eat breakfast," he called, and the two scrambled to their

feet.

"Thanks, man," Lucas said to Dustin as he pulled back a chair at the table. He seized the bottle of syrup and poured a generous amount over his waffle.

"Yeah, thanks," Will agreed, moving slower than Lucas as he approached the kitchen. When he made eye contact with Mike, he fell silent and both boys looked away awkwardly. He sat down and began tucking into his food, looking stubbornly down at the table the whole time. The others could sense the tension in the room. Lucas and Dustin eyed each other silently, and El, now finished with her waffle, looked back and forth from Will to Mike, not understanding what was going on.

After several minutes, the silence grew unbearable. Will stood, so suddenly that the others all jumped, and looked Mike square in the face.

"Mike," he said in a neutral tone. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Mike nodded nervously. "Uh, sure," he replied, getting up and following his friend to the living room. Will glanced toward the kitchen to make sure nobody was listening. Satisfied, he took a deep breath.

"Listen," he began. "I'm sorry for how I acted last night. I honestly don't know what I was angry at."

Mike opened his mouth to reply, but Will held up a hand, stopping him. "Actually, I think I was just surprised and maybe kind of grossed out. I know I shouldn't have been, I know it's natural and stuff, but... I don't know. El's been my sister for two years and you're one of my best friends. It's just weird for me." He chewed the inside of his cheek, thinking what to say next. "And then I got embarrassed because I *knew* my reaction was immature and I guess that was what made me angry. As soon as I left the room I wished I could go back in and apologize."

Mike smiled and clapped his friend on the shoulder. "It's fine, Will. Really. And you weren't being immature."

Will smiled back. "Oh, I definitely was. But yeah, it doesn't matter. I'm sorry for being such a dolt. Still friends, right?"

"Of course," Mike replied. "I'm the one who should be apologizing. I know she's your sister and I should've talked to you first, or asked your permission or something."

Will laughed. "Ugh, no, I'm glad you didn't. That would've been a really awkward conversation."

"True." Mike punched him in the arm lightly. "Now let's go back to the others. They probably think we're having a fight."

"Okay." Will nodded. But as Mike turned to walk away, he called him back. "Hey, Wheeler?"

"What's up, Byers?"

"I think you and El are a good couple and all, and I support your relationship all the way. You know that." Mike nodded, frowning in confusion. Will continued. "And like I said, you're one of my best friends, but if you hurt her in any way, or break her heart, then..."

Mike chuckled, cutting him off. "We're talking about El here, remember? You wouldn't need to do a thing. She could kill me in fifty different ways if she wanted to."

Will smiled. "Good point," he conceded, starting to head back toward the kitchen. As Mike watched his friend walking out of the living room, he suddenly remembered the conversation he had had with Lucas and Dustin the night before, concerning Will's sexuality. Were they right? The others had seemed so sure. If so, though, why had Will never told them? They had known him practically his whole life. If he felt comfortable with anyone, it should've been with them, shouldn't it?

"Will," Mike called, and the smaller boy turned, eyebrows raised expectantly. Mike suddenly realized he didn't know what he wanted to say. "You, um..."

"What?" Will prompted.

Mike shook his head, fidgeting awkwardly. "Never mind. Forget it. Just... you know you can talk to us, right? All of us. Me and Dustin and Lucas and El. About anything at all. We're here for you, you know? Just like you're here for us."

Will's eyes narrowed in suspicion, and for a moment Mike was worried he'd said something he shouldn't have, but then the other boy smiled. "I know, Mike. Thanks. I really appreciate it." He led the way out of the room, returning to the kitchen where the others were waiting, and Mike followed a second later.

"You guys work everything out?" Lucas called. Will and Mike exchanged a glance before they both nodded.

"Yep," Will said. "All good now." Mike nodded in agreement and Lucas gave them a double thumbs up.

"That's—" he began, but before he could finish the front door opened and Nancy stepped through. She surveyed them, raising an eyebrow at the used plates still occupying the kitchen table.

"Hey, boys. Hey, El," she said finally.

"Hi," they chorused back. She looked at Mike and tapped her watch.

"Mom and Dad should be back in an hour. I'd get those plates cleaned before that, if I were you," she told him before making her way up the stairs to her room.

"Yeah, yeah, we were going to anyway," Mike called. He heard the door to her room close a second later and muttered something impolite under his breath. "Give me your dishes, guys. I'll clean them." He brought them to the sink, turned the water on, applied some soap and started scrubbing. Not another minute later, though, and he heard Nancy calling again.

"Mike!" she shouted from upstairs.

"I'm doing it!" he yelled back irritably as his friends sniggered.

"Screw the dishes! I need you and El to come up here right now!" came her response. Mike stopped, turning to look at El with a sinking

feeling.

"Um..."

"I got the dishes," Will said quickly, standing and moving to the sink.
"Go talk to her."

"Thanks," Mike said gratefully. "Come on, El." He grabbed her hand and, with a growing feeling of apprehension, started up the stairs. He opened the door to Nancy's room, but she wasn't there. "Nance?"

"In here," she called from the bathroom.

The bathroom? *Shit.*

He entered to find her standing, one hand on her hip and foot tapping impatiently.

"What's up?" he asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

Nancy narrowed her eyes. "Listen, you two," she said in the bossy older sister voice that drove Mike crazy. "When I said to have fun, I meant it. But *seriously?*" She held up the small plastic garbage bin, tilting it so they could see the contents: a torn blue plastic wrapper and a condom.

"Ah." Mike flushed and looked at the floor. "...Sorry?"

"You realize Mom and Dad would throw three fits each if they found this?" Nancy scolded, looking from her brother to El.

Mike snorted disbelievingly. "What, you think they're going through the trash in your bathroom?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. They were out of town for a night and they know you two are dating. Remember when Mom picked the lock on my door because I was a little late for breakfast?"

"I guess," Mike admitted. "Okay, fine, I'll empty the trash. Give it here," he said, reaching for it, but Nancy pulled it back and frowned at him.

"Yeah, you will," she said. "But first you're going to clean my bathroom. Because also when I said to have fun, I meant, like, in your bed. Not in *my* shower. You gross fuck."

A/N: So this was more of a filler chapter, and I apologize for both that, and the long wait between 6 and 7. It's been pretty hectic lately, what with Thanksgiving and break homework, so I pretty much wrote all of this in one sitting, plus I'm in the middle of planning another fanfic so my focus has been kind of split. But I promise I'll try to be more consistent with the uploads in the future. Cheers all!

8. Homework

OKAY LISTEN UP, I GOT TWO THINGS TO SAY

So I want to start off by apologizing. I know it's been long time since my last update. And I'm really really sorry. I was struck with a pretty potent mixture of writer's block and crazy amounts of pre-Christmas break school work. Basically my free time is no longer free time, and it's hard to find time for writing. But hopefully that will end soon!

The second thing: remember what happened with Chapter 5? Doing that again for Chapter 8, since I've had a lot of requests for more mature scenes. It's in an (M-rated) fanfic that will be called Sex Ed Chapter 8: Homework. I'm going to warn you again: this one is *very* smutty. So, y'know how it works - stay away if that's not your thing. If you like it, though, I'll see you on over there!

9. Confrontation

A/N: So, I feel like it's becoming a bit of a thing to give fanfic recommendations. So here are a few of the ones I've been really enjoying of late.

More Than Friends? by chattrekisses [All around really fun and well written story]

After All This Time by ImObviouslyCrazy [Well written, nice and long, super fast updates... also some pretty darn good M scenes :P]

To Find You Again by MuffinLove03 [This one doesn't get the attention it deserves at all, which sucks because it's really really good. Y'all should go and check it out, because it's one of the best ST fics out there IMO, with a feel very similar to the actual show. Also the author is super chill and eloquent and fun to talk to :D]

Radio Static by Archer of Ecclesia [Still in its early days but wow, it's a promising start!]

July, July by Iris Violetta [Brief flashes from Mike's and El's lives. Written in a really nice, simple and elegant manner]

Eleven & Company by solangeswrites [Once again, all around a really fun and well written fic]

El Byers and the Secret Crush and Dustin Henderson and the Secret Crush by some . else . before [There shouldn't be spaces between the dots in her name. For some reason it doesn't show up if there aren't. Anyway... sadly I don't think the author is active anymore on the ST fanfic section, which is a shame because she's a really brilliant writer with novel-quality work]

That's some off the top of my head. There are a lot more great ones, of course — way too many to recommend. Those are just the ones that came to mind. So don't feel bad if yours isn't on the list :P

"Thank God it's finally getting colder," Lucas sighed happily, stretching luxuriously as they crested the hill. He turned and looked out beyond the rolling green slope. It was the same hill that (unknown to he, Dustin and Will) Mike and El had kissed on the night of the Snowball. The pair shared a secret smile now, remembering it.

"Finally?" Dustin repeated incredulously, tucking his arms into his sleeves so that he looked like some sort of bizarre two-limbed octopus. El giggled. "I was pretty happy with the super warm December, thanks very much."

"Yeah, well, that's 'cause you're a bitch," Lucas said back, his tone light. The two bickered for several minutes while Will, Mike, and El watched, amused smiles spreading across their faces.

The last day of school before break had just ended, and the group was looking forward to a week or two of relaxation and hangouts. They had decided to come to the hill for awhile before going to Mike's basement to watch a movie and maybe play a board game or three.

"But in the winter there's *snow*, man. How can you not like snow?" Lucas was saying.

"Uh-oh," Dustin said under his breath.

Lucas frowned. "Uh-oh, what?"

"Uh-oh, that," Dustin said, pointing. They all turned to look.

"Uh-oh indeed," Will said.

Three burly figures were struggling up the hill, making a beeline straight for the group. Even at a distance, they were easily recognizable. Brett Lachman, Martin Klein, and Don Frayser. Football players in their senior year at Hawkins High. After Troy and James had been scared off by El, the boys had enjoyed a relatively peaceful school experience for about a year. But of course, good things just don't last. Brett was the leader, a tall, broad-shouldered quarterback

with a dark crew-cut. Martin was smaller, but not by much, and Don was the size of both combined, complete with close set eyes and a wide, droopy mouth. He closely resembled the orcs on the cover of Mike's Dungeons and Dragons books.

"Look what we have here," Brett announced when they reached the top of the hill, surveying the group with contempt. "A frog, a fag, Midnight and Toothless." He wasn't particularly original with his names. At least Troy had made up his own.

"What do you want, Brett?" Mike asked warily.

"Oh, nothing," the football player replied breezily, shrugging his heavy shoulders. Then he tapped his chin, appearing to remember something. "Actually, Wheeler, there was one thing. A question for you."

"Yeah?" Mike knew where this was going. He knew, and he couldn't do a thing about it.

"Yeah. How the hell did you get in *that*?" He jerked a thumb at El, who stared at him, nonplussed. Brett had asked taken note of El several weeks previously and didn't hide the fact that he was attracted to her. El's reputation in school had quickly turned from "that cute girl who only hangs out with the nerds" to "that cute girl who Brett brags about having sex with", except everyone knew that wasn't true because it was common knowledge she was going out with Mike. Brett was eager to change this fact.

"I don't have time for this, Brett," Mike said, trying to keep his tone reasonable despite the anger bubbling up in his chest.

"No? You gotta go do some nerdy shit? Fairies and Fags?" Brett taunted. Martin and Don cackled.

"Wow, you're so clever," Lucas said sarcastically, applauding Brett. "Epitome of good humor, right there."

"*Epitome?*" Brett repeated scathingly. "I'm surprised you can use such big words, Midnight. I mean, you grew up with monkeys, didn't you?" He roared with laughter at his own joke. When he finally settled, his

tone changed entirely. "Now, how about you all fuck off and let us talk with the lady?"

"Not going to happen. She doesn't want to talk with you," Mike replied shortly, his fists clenching and unclenching unconsciously.

Brett snorted. "I think she can decide for herself, Froggy." His tone was totally confident. He had no doubt in his mind how things would play out.

El knew they were talking about her, but she didn't understand what Brett wanted. She looked from boy to boy uneasily. The three older boys advanced, stepping close and eyeing her. El didn't like that. It reminded her of the lab, where scientists had watched her like an animal through glass walls.

"Dude," Martin said after a pause, staring shamelessly right at her face. "She's a total babe."

"Yeah, but she's Wheeler's *girlfriend*," Don mocked, grinning stupidly at Mike.

"Oh, I don't think she *really* is," Brett snickered. "Right, slut? What, he cried and you felt bad for him? That why you date him?"

"Don't call her that."

"How else do you think Froggy got her?" Brett continued, nudging Martin and completely ignoring Mike's warning. "I mean, take a look at that." He gestured toward El's body and whistled.

"You think she'd suck me off if I asked real nice?" Martin asked, grabbing his crotch and grinning.

Brett snorted with laughter. "Why bother asking? Stuck with Wheeler, I bet she's desperate." He stepped close to El — way too close — and leered down at her. "That right? Froggy can't get it up, can he? You want a *real* man?"

El didn't reply. She didn't know what getting it up meant. She drew back silently, but Brett followed, overcompensating with his step so his body was pressed right up against hers.

"Okay, man, you need to back the fuck off." Mike's voice was tight and quiet, his brow contorted in barely restrained fury. He shoved Brett, hard, stepping between him and El. The bigger boy stumbled back a few paces. His cocky smile vanished. He regained his footing and approached Mike quickly, grabbing a fistful of his shirt collar and drawing him close.

"No, Wheeler, *you* need to back the fuck off," Brett spat, nose inches away from Mike's own. "Nerdy little shit. Why don't you run on back to your castle and leave your girl with us?" He dropped Mike and pushed him away, grin returning. "We promise to take care of her," he said, turning back toward El. His beady eyes slid up and down her body again, lingering on certain areas.

She decided it was time to speak up. "I will go with Mike," she said boldly, raising her chin. "Don't want to stay with you. Mouth-breather."

The gang of older boys whooped, exchanging grins. "Feisty," said Don from Martin's side. Brett nodded.

"Bit too feisty," he replied disapprovingly. "Don't like my meat talking back, feel me?" He grabbed El by the arm roughly, yanking her close, and blew foul smelling air right into her face. She wriggled against his iron grip.

"Maybe you wanna try keeping your trap shut, huh?" he breathed. "Use those lips for something other than talking? 'Cause they sure ain't buying you any favors."

"Brett," Mike growled, balling his hands into fists. "I'm warning you. Shut the fuck up and leave her alone." He took a step forward, but suddenly an arm wrapped around his shoulders. Don had seized him from behind in a half-hug that left him unable to move. Mike struggled fiercely, but the other boy was too big, too bulky.

"Shut the fuck up and leave her alone," Brett parroted in a high, squeaky voice. "No, Wheeler, I don't think so. Just because your slut likes to play hard to get doesn't mean you're the only one who gets to get in that. I mean, hell," he said. "She spreads her legs for you, she's spreading 'em for me. And my buds. Even if she wants to pretend

otherwise."

Brett raised a hand and touched El high on her cheek with the back of an index finger. She ducked away, right into the other hand, which cupped her backside, pinching her through her jeans. Brett whooped as Mike redoubled his efforts, struggling in vain against Don's hold.

"See, what'd I say?" he called to his friends gloatingly. He turned back to El. "You want it, don't you, slut?" he breathed in her ear. "Could you say my name for me? I bet you're a screamer, aren't you? The quiet ones are always the loudest in bed."

El's eyes were beginning to fill with tears. She understood what was happening now — how could she not? — and she didn't like it one bit, and she didn't know what to do, and she didn't like to see Mike restrained and held down, nor the expression of bitter helplessness on his face. She didn't like the hand that was pinching her down there. She didn't like the hand that was slipping beneath her shirt and sliding up her stomach and roughly grabbing a breast and—

—then everything turned to chaos.

First a fist slammed into Brett's nose. It was a sharp blow, delivered with anger and ferocity but not all that much strength. As it was, it caused Brett to stagger away from El, crying out and bringing a hand up to his own face to stem the sudden flow of bright blood.

"Who the—" he sputtered, eyes wide with fury. Then his mouth dropped open in shock. "*Byers.*"

Will Byers, little Will Byers with his bright plaid shirt and mild demeanor, had placed himself between Brett and El. His head barely came up to Brett's shoulder but his lip was curled in a fearless snarl. "You never *ever* touch my sister you *asshole*," he spat out.

Brett growled and raised a fist. He heaved a punch at Will, a big heavy roundhouse swing with all of his considerable weight behind it that probably would've put Will into a coma.

Had it connected.

A dark-skinned hand checked his blow at the wrist, absorbing his

momentum. A second later Lucas's own hard jab crashed right into Brett's solar plexus, *SMACK*, and the high school senior doubled over, gasping in pain. He heard a cry of pain from behind him and another sharp smack as Mike slammed an elbow into Don's face, wriggling from his grip before stepping up next to Lucas and Will, forming a protective line in front of El. After a second, Dustin joined them too, looking apprehensive but defiant. Brett's own friends stepped up to his side, cracking their knuckles and looming menacingly.

There was a moment of tense silence as the seven boys faced each other on the hill. Three hulking seniors against four sophomore comic book nerds.

Plus El.

But then, how could the older boys know?

They surged forward as one, howling wordlessly, but didn't get further than a step or two. The ground disappeared from beneath their feet and suddenly they were flying, all three of them, spinning through the air before slamming hard into the frozen ground. They looked up, a mixture of confusion, fear and anger written across their faces.

El pushed through the defensive line her friends had formed. A drop of blood slid from her nose, splashing onto the cold grass and steaming in the wintery air. Her eyes were blazing as she stared down at the three bullies, who gaped, awestruck and horrified.

"You don't hurt my friends," she said coldly. "You don't touch my friends. You don't talk to my friends. You don't say *anything* to *anyone*." She took a step forward and the three boys scuttled backward, crab-like, eyes wide with terror. "Or I will kill you."

Brett, Don, and Martin tried to stand, to run, but they couldn't. Some invisible force was pressing on them, keeping them pinned beneath its massive weight. It was beginning to hurt to breathe.

El took another step forward. "Understand?" she said.

They said nothing.

El lessened the pressure slightly. "Understand?" she repeated.

"Yes," Martin gasped after a few seconds. "Yes. We understand. Don't hurt us." His eyes were beginning to well up with tears. "Please don't hurt us."

El just looked at him, eyes narrowed. There were a few beats of silence and Martin squeezed his own eyes shut, waiting for *something* to happen, to have the breath crushed from his lungs by that impossible pressure that was seemingly coming from nowhere.

But then it was gone, as suddenly as it had appeared. He, Brett, and Don scrambled to their feet, still clearly unsure of what had just happened.

"Go," El commanded. They went. As fast as their unsteady legs could carry them, slipping and sliding down the icy hill, all too glad to get away from this girl who had just done the impossible. El watched them go for a moment before all the strength left her and she staggered to her knees. Mike rushed forward and caught her before she could fall.

"El, are you alright?" he asked urgently, gripping her arm tightly. She nodded weakly and he relaxed a little.

"Okay," she assured him. "Tired." Mike wiped the blood from her nose with his jacket sleeve before entwining his fingers with hers.

"Dude," Dustin said, a huge grin on his face as the other boys crowded around the two. "That was *badass*. They were pissing themselves."

"I hope they don't tell anyone," Mike said grimly, looking up from El's side. "I mean, now they know about El. That makes five. Them, Troy, and James."

Dustin shook his head. "They won't," he said confidently. "Did you see their faces when she said she'd kill them? They believed her, alright."

"I would," El said immediately. "Friends protect each other. If they hurt you again, I will kill them."

Mike squeezed her hand, saying nothing, but El could sense his gratitude. She squeezed back.

"I don't think that'll be necessary," Lucas said. "Dustin's right. El scared the shit out of them." He grinned, shaking his head in appreciation. "You were awesome," he told her, squatting by her side and patting her shoulder, and she gave him a shy little smile.

"Yeah, and plus, what would they say?" Will chimed in. "That they got beat up by Michael Wheeler's five-foot-zero girlfriend? They would die before they admitted that." The others all laughed.

"Yeah, and by Will Byers," Lucas added, punching his friend in the shoulder. "Dude, you weren't so bad yourself. I think you broke Brett's nose."

Will fidgeted, grinning and blushing red. "Uh, yeah, maybe," he mumbled, and Lucas punched his shoulder again, making him laugh.

"So now that the excitement's over..." Dustin tapped his watch. "We still planning on going to Mike's?"

They all chorused that yes, they were, before making their way down the hill. Lucas, Dustin, and Will went on ahead, leaving Mike and El to walk side by side, his arm around her shoulders and hers around his waist.

"I'm sorry those guys did that to you. They had absolutely no right to touch you," Mike said quietly after a beat. "And what they were saying was really disgusting. And it wasn't true."

El shook her head. "Not your fault," she said to him. She felt him nod. "Mike?" she asked after a second.

"What's up?"

"What is a *slut*?" she asked, brow wrinkling as she remembered what the bullies had called her.

Mike's eyes darkened. "Doesn't matter," he said shortly, staring ahead.

"Mike," she said firmly. "It's okay. Tell me."

He bit his tongue. "It's like..." Mike sighed. "It's a really, really awful thing to call a girl. It's like saying that they have sex with everyone who wants it. That they're easy, or that they're a..." He trailed off.

El frowned. "I don't have sex with everyone," she pointed out. "Only you."

He had to smile at her bluntness. "I know, El," he told her. "Like I said, it isn't true. They were just..."

"Mouth-breathers?"

"Yeah. Mouth-breathers." Mike leaned down kissed the top of her head. "I'm sorry I let them do what they did," he said for the second time. He frowned, about to continue, but El shushed him.

"You didn't let him," El reminded him. "You pushed him. And Will and Lucas hit him and then you all protected me."

Mike inclined his head, acknowledging her point. "Yeah, and then you saved all our asses," he said with a half smile.

El giggled. "Friends protect each other," she said again.

"Yes, they do."

They walked down the hill together, still wrapped in each other's arms.

A/N: Somewhat of a different feel from the previous chapters. Hope you enjoyed! As always, thanks for reading reviewing, liking, and favoriting. Cheers!

10. APOLOGY

Hello, everyone. Long time no see!

Soooo I've been absent for many many months and I'm sorry. Unfortunately, I had a pretty sudden and nasty legal issue involving the assault of a friend and myself. It was long, it was grueling, and after it was done, I had kind of just forgotten about writing ST fanfiction. But now Season 2 is out, and it rekindled my writing spark!

Now, I'm very sorry to disappoint, but I won't be continuing Sex Ed. I'm probably going to get some hate for that decision but it's just been way too long and I feel pretty out of touch with the story, especially now that the events of Season 2 are canon. THAT SAID, I will be starting a new Mileven fanfic! So if you enjoy my writing, I urge you to check it out.

Thanks again, guys. Thank you for reading and thank you for waiting. I'm sorry once more for dropping off the face of the earth.